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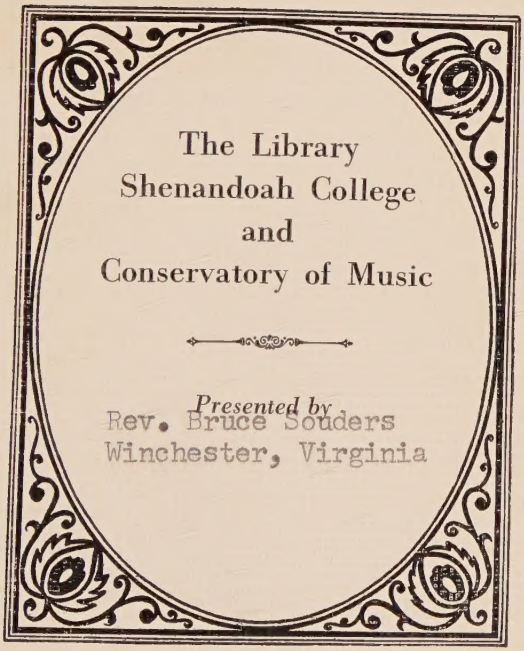
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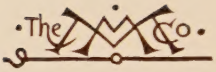

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THE AMERICAN NOVEL

BY
CARL VAN DOREN

New York
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1929

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TO

IRITA VAN DOREN

PREFACE

This book is meant to serve as a chapter in the history of the American imagination. Consequently it undertakes to do more than to recount and criticize the work of eminent novelists, or of novelists whether eminent or mediocre; so far as space permits, it is a record of the national imagination as exhibited in the progress of native fiction. In Fenimore Cooper's generation the expanding mood of the new republic, heretofore represented in almost no fiction whatever, was met by an energetic school of romancers. Their fashion passed about the middle of the nineteenth century, and there followed a relaxed interregnum of sentimentalism, during which, however, Hawthorne sounded his clear, profound, original note. After the Civil War the process which knit together all the sections of the country as they had not before been knit, encouraged the dominant mode of local color, which prevailed until about 1900. While the novel tended in this period to leave the field to the short story, it was nevertheless the period of Mark Twain, easily chief among those who have worked with native materials in native ways; of Henry James, the spokesman par excellence of those Americans whose imagination turns to Europe for its most affectionate exercise; and of William Dean Howells, mediator between the two extremes and principal American exponent of the doctrines of realism. At the end of the century,

about coincident with the imperialistic excitement of the Spanish War, came a brief reaction toward romance — rococo and prolific. During those same years there likewise began the discontent with romance and reticence from which springs the tendency of naturalism now current.

Aiming to be a history rather than a partizan document, the account here offered does not take sides with any of the modes of fiction which have existed, or which exist, in the United States. To this lack of partizanship may be ascribed a disinclination to define the term "novel" too exactly. A different critical disposition might have denied the name to certain allegories, romances, and humorous autobiographies admitted to the record apparently without question. As a matter of fact, they have all been questioned closely, with the resulting conviction that to classify and exclude them would be vain, since the effect of invented narrative is much the same no matter what the technical subdivision into which any specific book may fall. A fuller history of the American imagination would indeed have to take into account poems and plays and short stories as well, with all the national myths and legends and traditions and aspirations. This particular study, however, has had to be limited to long prose narratives in which the element of fact is on the whole less than the element of fiction.

The unpartizan and historical character of the book accounts also for the proportions assigned to exposition and criticism. It had to be borne in mind that, though there are useful critical studies of particular American novelists, no extended study of the American novel, in its various phases, has heretofore been made. Criticism has

therefore had to wait a little on exposition. Finally, novelists still living appear in this record only to the extent needful for an indication of the general tendencies of recent fiction. To write about contemporaries calls for a scale and method of treatment essentially different from that employed with writers whose work is done. Discussion of the American novel of the twentieth century is reserved for a further volume, already planned and in part executed.

In its general outlines the present study follows the chapters on fiction which the same author contributed to *The Cambridge History of American Literature* published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, with whose courteous permission this much larger version is considerably indebted to those chapters. Acknowledgments are due as well to *The Nation* for the use of materials which have appeared in its pages.

Carl Van Doren.

February, 1921.

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THE AMERICAN NOVEL

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF FICTION

1. Arguments and Experiments

Prose fiction, by the outbreak of the American Revolution one of the most popular forms of literature in Europe, had as yet a small and insecure reputation in the British colonies which subsequently became the United States. Not only were there still no native novels, but the great English masters of the art had little vogue. Richardson's *Pamela*, indeed, a book read everywhere as much for its piety as for its power to entertain, had been printed in 1744 at Philadelphia by that shrewd judge of public taste and private profits, Benjamin Franklin, and there were editions the same year at New York and Boston. But Richardson's later novels, like Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, did not appear for more than forty years, when all of them were brought out in abridged editions in 1786. Even *Robinson Crusoe* had to wait nearly fifty years for an American printer, while *Rasselas* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* only tardily crossed the Atlantic. English editions, of course, had a moderate circulation, but it could not have been great or a keener rivalry would have been awakened in such towns as Boston

and Philadelphia in spite of the coldness of utilitarians and Puritans. Probably the Southern and Middle colonies read more novels than New England. William Byrd of Virginia, owner of one of the largest private libraries in America, possessed novels by Defoe, Fielding, Smollett, Le Sage, and Cervantes (who as satirist and moralist was widely admired), as well as more trivial performances. There was at least one copy of *Joseph Andrews* in Philadelphia in 1744, for Dr. Alexander Hamilton of Maryland, then on a leisurely vacation, read it there and thought it the best work of the kind he had ever seen. And New England was by no means innocent of novels. Jonathan Edwards himself, conspicuous among the saints, read *Sir Charles Grandison*, and with such interest that he resolved to correct his own hitherto neglected style upon the example of Richardson; while Stephen Burroughs, as conspicuous among the sinners, later charged many of his offenses to his early reading of such books as *Guy, Earl of Warwick*, which he read about the time of the Revolution.

In part this apathy to fiction was due to the common colonial tendency to lag behind in matters of taste and culture. Pope in poetry and Addison in prose long sufficed for models among the Americans, and theological and political discussion proceeded with little reference to prevailing modes in imaginative literature. But even more important than mere apathy was the positive antipathy which showed itself when, soon after the Revolution, novel reading began to increase with great rapidity, and native novelists appeared in respectable numbers. The moralists were aroused and exclaimed against the change — their cries appearing in the magazines of the day side by side

with moral tales. Nearly every grade of sophistication applied itself to the problem. The dullest critics contended that novels were lies; the pious, that they served no virtuous purpose; the strenuous, that they softened sturdy minds; the utilitarian, that they crowded out more useful books; the realistic, that they painted adventure too romantic and love too vehement; the patriotic, that, dealing with European manners, they tended to confuse and dissatisfy republican youth. In the face of such censure American novelists came forward late and apologetically, armed for the most part with the plea that they told the truth, pointed to heaven, or devoutly believed in the new republic. Before 1800 the sweeping abuse of the older school had been forced to share the field of criticism with occasional efforts to distinguish good novels from bad. The relative merits of Fielding and Smollett were discussed almost as frequently as, fifty years later, were those of Dickens and Thackeray, and in much the same confusion of ethical and æsthetic considerations. Fielding was of course preferred by the enlightened, Smollett by the robustious, Sterne by the "sensible," and Richardson, most popular of all it will be seen, by the domestic and sentimental. Indeed, to the influence of Richardson, with something from Sterne, must be credited the first regular American novel, *The Power of Sympathy*, a poor and stilted narrative in epistolary form which was published by Sarah Wentworth Morton at Boston in 1789.

Political allegory, however, had already begun to prepare the way for invented narratives. The eighteenth century would have been less than itself had it brought forth in America only sentimental romances. Franklin

is but one of many evidences that humor and satire were not silent. Francis Hopkinson, also of Philadelphia, produced an allegory which lies nearly as close to fiction as to history. In *A Pretty Story* (1774) he set forth, after the fashion earlier established by Dr. Arbuthnot, the history of a certain nobleman (the king) who had an old farm (England) and a new farm (the colonies) in the management of which his wife (Parliament) and his steward (the ministry) constantly interfered to the annoyance of his sons (the colonists) and to the great derangement of his own affairs. The story breaks off abruptly with Jack (Boston) shut up in his farm and turning for help to his brothers. The satire was without much bitterness or indignation, and perhaps for that reason all the more effective through its shrewd and amusing narrative. Jeremy Belknap, the learned historian of New Hampshire, likewise tried his hand at allegory in *The Foresters* (1792, enlarged 1796). His foresters are the colonists, whose career he follows in a mild comic history, consistently allegorized, from the days of settlement, through the colonial wars, the Revolution, the Confederation, the Constitution, the establishment of the Republic, and the polemic episode of Citizen Genêt.

Neither Hopkinson nor Belknap is to be compared, for comic force and satirical point and power of observation, to the Pennsylvanian Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748–1816), who between 1792 and 1805 published the various parts of his satirical novel *Modern Chivalry*. It is indicative of the changing taste of his time that he began his book in 1787 in the meter of *Hudibras*, recently employed with such success in Trumbull's *McFingal*, but later changed

to prose. By his own confession, he followed the style of Hume, Swift, and Fielding — like Swift in *A Tale of a Tub* alternating chapters of narrative with ironical essays on all manner of subjects. Captain Farrago, the hero, is a new Don Quixote, who whimsically takes it into his head to leave his farm in western Pennsylvania "and ride about the world a little, with his man Teague at his heels, to see how things were going on here and there, and to observe human nature." As a description of manners in the early days of the Republic the book is unapproached by any other. Races, elections, rural conjurors, village "philosophers" or pseudo-scientists, inns, duels and challenges, treaties with Indians, the Society of the Cincinnati, hedge parsons, brothels, colleges, Congress, Quakers, lawyers, theaters, law courts, Presidential levees, dancing masters, excise officers, tar and feathers, insurrections — all these are displayed in the first part of the book with obvious verisimilitude and unflagging spirit. Much of the action of this part is furnished by the doings of Teague, a grotesque and witless Sancho Panza, whose impudent ambition survives the most ludicrous and painful misadventures. Brackenridge regards him as typical of the political upstarts of the period, and his triumphs as an accusation properly to be brought against the public which followed such sorry leaders. In Part II Captain Farrago, after a brief hiatus spent on his farm, resumes his travels, which at first do not take him beyond the limits of the nearest village, with its newspaper, academy, lunatic asylum, and fair, but which eventually bring him to a settlement in the back country of which he becomes governor. The remainder of the book, ostensibly a chronicle

of the new settlement, is practically a burlesque of the history of civilization in America. The settlers war with the Indians and make a constitution. They legislate like madmen, under the guidance of a visionary from Washington who holds that beasts should have the vote as well as men, and actually persuades his fellows to commission a monkey clerk and admit a hound to the bar. Brackenridge aimed his satire primarily at doctrinaires and demagogues, but he whipped as well almost all the current follies and affectations, revising his book from time to time to keep pace with new absurdities. For half a century *Modern Chivalry* was widely popular, and nowhere more so than along the very frontier which it satirized and which read it as more or less a true history. It was among the earliest books printed west of the Alleghanies.

Satire had to be helped by sentiment, however, before fiction could win the largest audience. Indeed, until Scott had definitely established a new mode of fiction for the world, the potent influence in American fiction was Richardson. The amiable ladies who produced most of the early sentimental novels commonly held, like Mrs. Rowson, that their knowledge of life had been "simply gleaned from pure nature," because they dealt with facts which had come under their own observation; but like other amateurs they saw in nature what art had assured them would be there. Nature and Richardson they found the same. Whatever bias they gave this Richardsonian universe was due to a pervading consciousness that their narratives would be followed chiefly by women. The result was a highly domestic world, limited in outlook, where the talk was of careless husbands, of grief for dead chil-

dren, of the peril of many childbirths, of the sentiment and the religion without which it used to be thought women could not endure their sex's destiny. Over all hangs the unceasing menace of the seducer, who appears in such multitudes that modern readers might think that age one of the most illicit on record if they did not understand that Richardson's Lovelace is merely being repeated in different colors and proportions. It is true, however, that the two most important novels of this sort, as well as *The Power of Sympathy*, were based on actual happenings. Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) recorded the tragic and widely known career of Elizabeth Whitman of Hartford, who, having coquetted with the Reverend Joseph Buckminster, was seduced by a mysterious rake generally identified with Jonathan Edwards's son Pierrepont, and died in misery at the Old Bell Tavern in Danvers, Massachusetts, in 1788. *The Coquette* saw thirty editions in forty years, and was known in almost every household of the Connecticut Valley. It has not survived as has Susannah Haswell Rowson's *Charlotte* (1794), one of the most popular novels ever published in the United States. Mrs. Rowson, an American only by immigration, had probably written the novel in England (where it seems to have been published in 1790), but *Charlotte Temple*, to call it by its later title, was thoroughly naturalized and has had its largest circulation here. It has persuaded an increasingly naïve underworld of fiction readers — housemaids and shopgirls — to buy more than a hundred editions and has built up a legend about a not too authentic tomb in Trinity Churchyard, New York, which at least since about 1845 has borne

the name " Charlotte Temple " in concession to the legend but which probably contains the ashes of a certain Charlotte Stanley whom a British officer named Montrésor seduced from her home in England and deserted in New York, much as in the novel. This simple story Mrs. Rowson embroidered with every device known to the romancer — sentimentalism, bathos, easy tears, high-flying language, melodrama, moralizings without stint or number; and yet something universal in the theme has kept it, in its way, still alive without the concurrence of critics or historians of literature.

The tradition that Abigail Stanley, mother of Elizabeth Whitman, was a cousin of Charlotte, serves to illustrate the process by which *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* won a hearing from a community which winced at fiction: like sagas they stole upon their readers in the company of facts. A similar companionship appears in Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797). The hero, Updike Underhill, after an account of his youth and education in the backwoods of New England, and of his experiences as a schoolmaster there, goes on to Boston, begins the practice of medicine, proceeds to Philadelphia, where he meets Franklin, and to Virginia, where he is shocked at encountering a figure quite unknown to New England, a sporting parson; later he goes to sea, visits London, tells of Tom Paine, observes the horrors of a slave ship, and is captured by the Algerines, among whom he spends the six years recounted in the second volume. The value of the book lies largely in its report of facts, which it gives clearly and freshly. That Tyler thought

of the traveler and the novelist as about equally his models appears from his preface, upon which the fame of *The Algerine Captive* principally depends. In 1787, it should be remembered, he had produced our earliest comedy, *The Contrast*, opposing to foreign affectations the rustic worth of the first "stage Yankee." Now ten years later he renewed his demand for nativism, while pointing out that the status of fiction had greatly changed in the interim. Formerly, he says, "books of Biography, Travels, Novels, and modern Romances, were confined to our sea ports; or, if known in the country, were read only in the families of Clergymen, Physicians, and Lawyers; while certain funeral discourses, the last words and dying speeches of Bryan Shakeen, and Levi Ames, and some dreary somebody's Day of Doom, formed the most diverting part of the farmer's library." But "no sooner was a taste for amusing literature diffused than all orders of country life, with one accord, forsook the sober sermons and Practical Pieties of the fathers, for the gay stories and splendid impieties of the Traveller and the Novelist. The worthy farmer no longer fatigued himself with Bunyan's Pilgrim up the 'hill of difficulty' or through the 'slough of despond'; but quaffed wine with Brydone in the hermitage of Vesuvius, sported with Bruce on the fairy land of Abyssinia: while Dolly, the diary [*sic*] maid, and Jonathan, the hired man, threw aside the ballad of the cruel stepmother, over which they had so often wept in concert, and now amused themselves into so agreeable a terrour, with the haunted houses and hobgoblins of Mrs. Ratcliffe [*sic*], that they were both afraid to

sleep alone." Such addiction to romance, Tyler argued, was too exciting for plain Americans; their novels like their clothes ought to be homespun.

It was in the very year of Royall Tyler's preface that the first American to make authorship his sole profession decided upon fiction as the form he should undertake. Charles Brockden Brown (1770–1810) of Philadelphia as a schoolboy aspired to be an epic poet, and contemplated epics on Columbus, Pizarro, and Cortez, possibly desiring to rival Timothy Dwight, whose *Conquest of Canaan* appeared in 1785, or Joel Barlow, whose *Vision of Columbus* followed two years later. But after reading William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) Brown acquired a new ambition. He would patriotically try for reality as some others were trying; and of course he would lay stress on the moral tendency of his performances, as all had done. In addition he hoped "to enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect." At the same time, he was too good a democrat to write for geniuses alone, and he believed that while they were being stirred by the ideas of a novel the plain people could be captured by its plot.

Brown's important books were written in a few vivid months, spent mostly in New York. His specific indebtedness to Godwin appears chiefly in a fondness for the central situation of *Caleb Williams:* an innocent and somewhat helpless youth in the grasp of a patron turned enemy. The parallel is exact in *Arthur Mervyn* (1799–1800), which brings a young man of that name to Philadelphia, makes him blunder into the secret of a murder, and subjects him to elaborate persecutions from the mur-

derer. A surviving fragment of the lost *Sky-Walk* (written in 1797) shows that Brown there varied the Godwin situation by making the patron a woman. In *Ormond* (1799) by still another variation a woman is the victim, Constantia Dudley, pursued by the enthusiast and revolutionary Ormond until in self-defense she is obliged to kill him. Constantia won the passionate regard of a greater among Godwin's disciples, Shelley, to whom she was the type of virtuous humanity oppressed by evil custom. But Brown's victims do not have to undergo the cumulative agony of Godwin's, for the reason that Brown worked too violently to be able to organize a scheme of circumstances all converging upon any single victim. And more than his vehement methods of work handicapped him in his rivalry with Godwin: to be a master of the art of calm and deliberate narrative he must have had Godwin's cold and consistent philosophy of life. As a matter of fact, while the leaven of revolutionary rationalism stirs in his work, it does not, as with Godwin's, pervade the mass.

The Godwinian elements in Brown now seem less impressive than certain effects which he was able to produce by the use of native material. In 1793 he had fled with his family to the country to escape the epidemic of yellow fever which then visited Philadelphia; five years later he had gone through a similar invasion of the plague at New York. His letters show how deeply he was moved by the only personal contact he ever had with such affairs of danger and terror as he chose to write about. Composing *Ormond* almost before the pestilence had receded, Brown transferred his impressions from the New York of 1798

to the Philadelphia of 1793, as he did in *Arthur Mervyn*, perhaps for some gain in perspective; but in both he wrote with an eye on the fact as nowhere else in his books. With unsparing, not to say sickening, veracity, he reproduced the physical horrors of the plague — its loathsome symptoms and its fearful stenches; he was even more veracious in his account of the mental and spiritual horrors which accompanied it: the superstitious dread and foolhardy courage which sprang in different people from the current ignorance with regard to infection; the pusillanimous flight of many who were deeply needed; the brutal callousness of certain wretches who stayed to nurse the sick and then neglected them; the general moral collapse. Less successful than these experiments was that in *Edgar Huntly* (1799), wherein he turned to the material which beyond any other was to be celebrated in American fiction for half a century: frontier adventure. Brown claimed for this book the merit "of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end. The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness, are far more suitable; and for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology." As far as his knowledge and his prepossessions allowed him, Brown succeeded in his experiment. But he knew little of the frontier, either its scenery or its customs, and no more of the Indians than he could have picked up from books or casual meetings in the towns. What he did was to substitute new devices for calling forth

much the same passions and sympathies as had been addressed by the older Gothic romances. His wild regions and his wild adventures are all seen through an intensely romantic temperament with only occasional intervals for realism. As in his handling of the yellow fever, Brown shows power to set forth grisly details of blood and suffering, and he treats his Indians without the glamor with which they were already invested by certain sentimentalists. But so far as reality of impression is concerned, the visible Indians are none of them so memorable as the old woman called Queen Mab, who never appears in person and who exists chiefly as a symbol of a race vanquished and yet still clinging to its old domains with a tenacity that is poetic. Vivid, too, is the impression of the feverish, nocturnal wanderings, without much aim or sequence, to which Huntly devotes his time. Here again Brown's shambling narrative methods dull the edge of his story: like most of the romancers of his age, he moved forward through a cloud.

As a rationalist he tried to solve the mystery of the cloud about *Edgar Huntly* by explaining that both Clithero, the suspected villain who is really innocent, and Huntly are addicted to sleep-walking, a subject which was just then, as contemporary journals show, under discussion and much debated. Also illustrative of Brown's attempt to fuse mystery with science, and in itself more effective than this sleep-walking, is the ventriloquism which plays a prominent part in his best — that is, his most compact, most psychological, and most powerful — novel, *Wieland* (1798). Its plot was primarily founded upon the deed of an actual religious fanatic of Tomhannock, New

York, who in a mad vision had heard himself commanded to destroy all his idols, and had murdered his wife and children with ferocious brutality. With this theme Brown involved the story of Carwin, the "biloquist," to make the "voices" seem less incredible than in the original. It may be assumed that ventriloquism did not seem a pinchbeck solution in 1798, when it was a trick little known or practised; and Brown, too much an artist to make his ventriloquist a mere instigator to murder, makes him out a hero-villain whose tragedy it is that he has to sin, not as the old morality had it, because of mere wickedness, but because of the driving power of the spirit of evil which no man can resist and from which only the weak are immune. Yet though Carwin by his irresponsible acts of ventriloquism in and out of season actually sets going in Theodore Wieland's mind the train of thought which terminates in the crimes, he does no more than to arouse from unsuspected depths a frenzy already sleeping in Wieland's nature. These were cases of speculative pathology which Brown had met in his Godwinian twilights, beings who had for him the reality he knew best, that of dream and passion; from them comes the fever in the climate which gives the book its shuddering power. To a notable extent *Wieland* fulfills the rules Brown had laid down in his announcement of *Sky-Walk*. Ventriloquism, religious murder, and a case of spontaneous combustion make up the "contexture of facts capable of suspending the faculties of every soul in curiosity." These were for the unlearned. The apparent scene of action is laid upon the banks of the Schuylkill; this was patriotic realism. But for those of his readers who might have

" soaring passions and intellectual energy," as Brown had, the absorbing thing was the clash of mighty forces, the din of good and evil, which resound through the story, and which in spite of awkward narrative, strained probabilities, and a premature solution, lift it above the ephemeral — the earliest American romance of distinction.

2. The Three Matters of American Romance

Except for the work of Irving, who deliberately chose short stories to avoid any rivalry with Scott, the first twenty years of the nineteenth century produced no memorable fiction whatever in the United States. Even the example of Scott, who was immensely popular, at first failed to arouse imitators. Indeed, the brilliance of his achievement served to discourage his warmest admirers. Such learning, such experience, such humor, such abundance as the " Author of Waverley " displayed — who dared match his powers against them? Moreover, the elements which gave Scott his vogue, and which for a time seemed the essential elements of fiction, were not easily transportable to another soil. The attitude of Americans in the matter was well set forth by John Bristed in his book on *The Resources of the United States* in 1818: " Of native *novels* we have no great stock, and none good; our democratic institutions placing all the people on a dead level of political equality; and the pretty equal diffusion of property throughout the country affords but little room for varieties, and contrasts of character; nor is there much scope for fiction, as the country is quite new, and all that has happened from the first settlement to the

present hour, respecting it, is known to every one. There is, to be sure, some traditionary romance about the Indians; but a novel describing these miserable barbarians, their squaws, and papooses, would not be very interesting to the present race of American readers." To Bristed, as to most contemporaries, it seemed impossible for the novel to flourish in a country which had no aristocracy, no distinct classes of society, no wide range of poverty and wealth, no legendary and semi-legendary lore like that of the English-Scottish border. A genuine task challenged the American imagination before any considerable body of fiction could be achieved. Whatever man of genius might appear, there was still the problem of reaching a public taught that fiction belonged to the Old World, fact to the New; taught to look for the pleasures of the imagination on the soil where they had long existed and to which even the most self-conscious and politically independent American had been accustomed to look back with admiration, with some vague nostalgia of the spirit. Yet at the very moment when Bristed wrote, national passions were awake which within a half-dozen years had not only elicited a great romancer but had shown a popular imagination unexpectedly prepared for him. Out of such emotions come, in the proper ages, ballads and epic lays. In the United States, though prose fiction was the form at hand, the narratives were all romantic, and the literary process but repeated the processes of romantic ages. As in medieval France there were three "matters" of romance,

De France, et de Bretagne, et de Rome la grant,

so in the United States there were also three: the Revolution, the Settlement, and the Frontier.

The Revolutionary generation had been an age of myth-making. Washington, for instance, to his very face was apotheosized by his followers with a passion of language which notoriously embarrassed him. Almost before his bones were cold appeared Parson Weems's astounding tract, miscalled a biography, to catch the popular fancy at once and to establish the absurd legend of Washington's superhuman virtues. "Private life," Weems avowed, "is real life"; and though, lacking first-hand knowledge, he was obliged to invent, he seemed intimate and credible to an audience somewhat overwhelmed by the heavy splendor of the more official orations and odes and sermons called forth by Washington's death. Thereafter the legend grew unchecked, until the pious Catherine Maria Sedgwick, in 1835, apologizing for the introduction of the hero in her novel *The Linwoods*, could write "in extenuation of what may seem presumption, that whenever the writer has mentioned Washington, she has felt a sentiment resembling the awe of the pious Israelite when he approached the ark of the Lord." The legends of Arthur and Charlemagne grew no more rapidly in the most legend-breeding age — indeed, did not grow so rapidly as this. And around Washington, as around Arthur his knights and around Charlemagne his peers, were speedily grouped such minor heroes as Francis Marion, whose life was also written by Weems, Israel Putnam, whom David Humphreys celebrated, Patrick Henry, whose biographer was no less a person than William Wirt, Attorney-General of the United States, Ethan Allen, who wrote his own record, and

others whose fame or infamy (as in the case of Benedict Arnold) depended less specifically upon books. As all these heroes were consistently whitened by their biographers, so was the cause for which they fought; until the second generation after the Revolution had hardly a chance to suspect — at least so far as popular literature was concerned — that the Revolution had been anything but a melodrama victoriously waged by stainless Continental heroes against atrocious villains in British scarlet, followed by a victory without ugly revenges and crowned by a reconstruction culminating in the divinely-inspired Constitution. George Bancroft himself, a scholar of large attainments, could write as late as 1860 such words as these concerning the Declaration of Independence: "This immortal state paper, which for its composer was the aurora of enduring fame, was 'the genuine effusion of the soul of the country at that time,' the revelation of its mind, when in its youth, its enthusiasm, its sublime confronting of danger, it rose to the highest creative powers of which man is capable. The bill of rights which it promulgates, is of rights that are older than human institutions, and spring from the eternal justice that is anterior to the state. Two political theories divided the world; one founded the commonwealth on the reason of state, the policy of expediency; the other on the immutable principles of morals: the new republic, as it took its place among the powers of the world, proclaimed its faith in the truth and reality and unchangeableness of freedom, virtue, and right. The heart of Jefferson in writing the declaration, and of congress in adopting it, beat for all humanity; the assertion of right was made for the entire

world of mankind and all coming generations, without any exception whatever; for the proposition which admits of exceptions can never be self-evident. As it was put forth in the name of the ascendent people of that time, it was sure to make the circuit of the world, passing everywhere through the despotic countries of Europe; and the astonished nations as they read that all men are created equal, started out of their lethargy, like those who have been exiles from childhood, when they suddenly hear the dimly remembered accents of their mother tongue." This, the most patriotic American must now admit, is the language of romance.

The deeds and personages of the Revolution, steadily growing in the popular imagination under the stimulus of an exultant and hopeful independence, were naturally first expressed and most highly regarded of the new national themes. But side by side with them, in part aroused and drawn along by the Revolution, went the matter of the Settlement, consisting of the tales told in every state about its colonial days. Here again Parson Weems took a hand and wrote folk-books about William Penn and Benjamin Franklin. Weems, himself a Virginian, in his choice of these Pennsylvania worthies as subjects for his art illustrates the national feeling which gradually superseded the old colonial memories and prejudices. The new states no sooner pooled their national resources than they began unconsciously to pool their resources of tradition, of legend, of local poetry. Their wealth was as unequal in this respect as in any other, and widely different in quality. Certain themes from the first assumed a prominence that attracted to them the national imagination as it

was attracted to no others. The landing of the Pilgrims, the witchcraft mania at Salem, Connecticut and its Charter Oak, the Dutch on the Hudson, Penn's liberality and tolerance, the settlement at Jamestown, Pocahontas and her career, Bacon's Rebellion, John Locke's schemes for the Carolinas, the debtors in Georgia, and, somewhat later, the siege of Louisburg and Braddock's defeat: each of these early became the center of an increasing legend. Particularly important was a theme which in some form or other belonged to every colony — the warfare with the Indians for undisturbed possession of the soil from which they had been driven. So long as the natives had been dangerous to the invaders there had existed that bitterness of race-hatred which goes along with race-menace, and which kept out of the records of the old Indian wars, from Maine to Florida, any real magnanimity or sympathy for the dispossessed owners of the land. They were as paynims to Christian knights, as the sons and daughters of Amalek to the invaders of Canaan. King Philip's War in New England having begotten better books than any other, it lived in the popular memory more vividly than did the equally bitter and important but unrecorded Tuscarora and Yemassee wars in the Carolinas, for instance. The Deerfield raid, in large measure because of the Rev. John Williams's narrative of his captivity, became classic while similar episodes elsewhere were forgotten. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, when the Indian was no longer in any way a menace, he had begun to be sentimentalized by admirers of the natural man, with whom he was commonly identified by Europeans

and not infrequently by the descendants of the very Americans who had hated him so bitterly a century before.

The Indian was a link connecting the matter of the Settlement with the matter of the Frontier, the only one which had a contemporary aspect. It was the frontier not as remembered from the beginnings but as reported from the more distant territories where it still lay in the early years of the new century. Even before the Revolution not a few imaginations had turned inland. The settlement of Kentucky had excited the seaboard, and Daniel Boone, though not the greatest of the pioneers, before 1800 was already beginning to be the most famous of all of them, a true folk-hero. Literature unquestionably did him this service, in the person of the eccentric schoolmaster John Filson, who wrote for Boone his *Adventures* in 1784. Later the Louisiana Purchase drew still more eyes to the West, while the government expedition conducted by Lewis and Clark, rather less through its reports than through busy rumor, had an influence upon the popular imagination perhaps larger than that ever produced by any other American exploring venture. As contrasted with the tradition of the Settlement or of the Revolution, the reports concerning the contemporary frontier came as news, but there was still about them the haze of distance — distance in miles if not in years. The Great Lakes, the prairies, the plains and mountains beyond, the fever lands of the lower Mississippi, and especially the broad rivers and bluegrass of Kentucky, all of these constituted a sort of hinterland for the national imagination which writers of fiction were not slow to take advantage of. Nor did the frontier

lie entirely inland. The sea also was a frontier. From every port of the New England coast, and to a less degree from the Atlantic coast generally, ships went out to every corner of the world, particularly to the mysterious Pacific, with its strange calms and rich pastures for fishermen, and to the exotic countries beyond, but also to the crowded Mediterranean, the banks of Newfoundland, the neighborly West Indies. The new nation was setting out in every direction to become acquainted with its own immense domain and to establish communications between it and all the rest of the world, real or imaginative.

Such potentialities, of course, still ran a long way before the facts at the time Bristed made his unhopeful prophecy. What he said of existing American fiction suited its recent examples accurately enough. John Davis, a visiting Englishman, had taken a fancy to the Pocahontas legend and had dealt with it in three versions in his *Travels* (1803), *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas* (1805), and *The First Settlers of Virginia* (1806). Preposterous as they all are, they are interesting as the first treatment of one of the most persistent of American legends. A rollicking anti-romance, *Female Quixotism* (1808?) by Tabitha Tenney, which made very good fun of the novels of the day by showing into how many follies its heroine could blunder by taking the manners of such novels for her guide, was far less popular than the absurdly sentimental performance, probably by Isaac Mitchell, *The Asylum* (1811), which achieved at least a score of editions and exhibits the worst qualities of Mrs. Radcliffe to an extent which now makes it incredibly amusing. The nadir of the old-fashioned, sensational, senti-

mental romance was reached, however, in Samuel Woodworth's *The Champions of Freedom* (1816), written to order to celebrate the second war with England. Pompous language (Ossian mixed with Sterne and Cicero), a ghost that walks like a man, shrieking patriotism, and ineffable sentimentality are all it has to commend it. No wonder that from such monstrosities the public turned with delight to a story-teller by comparison so natural, so rational, so critical, so sensible as Fenimore Cooper.

CHAPTER II

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

The task of becoming the principal romancer of the new nation might have weighed heavily upon Cooper had he entered his career as a novelist in any self-conscious way. Instead, he fell almost accidentally into authorship. Unlike the bookish Brown, Cooper had been trained in the world of action and adventure. Born at Burlington, New Jersey, in 1789, the son of Judge William Cooper and Susan Fenimore, Cooper had been taken when a baby to Cooperstown, the raw central village of a pioneer settlement recently established by his father on Otsego Lake, New York. Here the boy saw at first hand the varied life of the border, observed its shifts and contrivances, and learned to feel the mystery of the dark forest which lay beyond the cleared circle of his own life — a mystery which must be taken into account in any attempt to understand the American character in its frontier aspects. Judge Cooper, less a typical backwoodsman than a kind of warden of the New York marches, like Judge Templeton in *The Pioneers*, did not keep his son in the woods but sent him first to the rector of St. Peter's in Albany, who grounded him in Latin and Anglican theology, and then to Yale, where he wore his college duties so lightly as to be dismissed in his third year. Thinking the navy might furnish better discipline than Yale, Judge Cooper shipped

his son before the mast on a merchant vessel to learn the art of seamanship which there was then no naval academy to teach. On his first voyage the ship was chased by pirates and stopped by British searching parties, incidents which Cooper never forgot. Commissioned in 1808 as midshipman, he first served on the Atlantic and later in the same year was sent with a party to Lake Ontario to build a brig for service against the British on inland waters. He visited Niagara, served for a time on Lake Champlain, and in 1809 was ordered back to the ocean. In the natural order of events he would have fought in the War of 1812, but having been married in 1811 to Susan Augusta DeLancey, he resigned his commission, gave up all hope of a naval career, and began the quiet life of a country proprietor.

During the nine years that followed there is no evidence that Cooper ever thought of authorship, even as an amusement, much less as a profession. Except for three years at Cooperstown, where he stood more less as heir to the manor, he lived in his wife's native county of Westchester. Perhaps nowhere else in the United States could Cooper have led an existence so nearly resembling that of an eighteenth-century English squire. Westchester had been favored by the country gentry in colonial days and still cherished aristocratic traditions. Here Cooper was further confirmed in his theological opinions, which were orthodox and grew steadily stronger, not to say more intolerant, during his entire life; in his political doctrines, by which he belonged with few reservations to the idealistic, irascible, somewhat crude, and considerably aristocratic older democracy which had achieved the Revolution;

and in his social prejudices, which were all that might have been expected from a man of his theology and politics. He believed in a propertied governing class, the subordination of the lower orders, and clear-cut caste distinctions. Rank, according to his opinions, naturally demanded of the men who possessed it a proper dignity, magnanimity, courage, knowledge, public service, and chivalry toward women; women of rank he expected to be less positive but to unite to domestic competence and loyalty a certain elaborate yet timid decorum. Toward the less fortunately placed classes Cooper believed he had the feelings of a good American democrat. As a matter of fact, he was full of that " condescension " which the eighteenth century mistook for a virtue. He tended to admit humbler personages to his fiction for the diversity they brought and to admire them preëminently for their devotion to their superiors. Even his greatest characters drawn from the people, Harvey Birch, Natty Bumppo, and Long Tom Coffin, have about them each some touch of the faithful body-servant, though they are saved by a larger element of loyalty to a cause, Birch to the Revolution, Bumppo to the life of unspoiled nature, and Coffin to the deep sea. Besides the typical opinions of his class, Cooper had also its typical information. He read the accepted classics, interested rather in modern than in ancient literature, and concerned more with history and biography than with poetry, philosphy, or science. He knew little of the fine arts. Later something of a traveler in Europe, during his formative years he saw, except upon his ocean voyages, only America, and little besides New York, its cities and its frontier. American history generally

— and particularly that of New York, including its sparse antiquities and its topography — Cooper knew unusually well, though here again his knowledge came generally from the commoner sources. As a true New Yorker of the old breed, he had, of course, a tender and intimate acquaintance with the British peerage. Of the European continent he had no very wide knowledge, and like the average American of Federalist sympathies, he distrusted the French. In seamanship, his actual profession, he was better grounded than any man, English or American, who had ever used the ocean as the scene of a novel.

The accident which threw Cooper, thus equipped by 1820, into fiction was a challenge which his wife made him to write a better novel than one which he had been reading with great disgust. He accepted the challenge, wrote an unimportant domestic-sentimental romance, *Precaution* (1820), and found himself so much attracted by authorship that within three years he had written three of his best novels, each of them in one of the types he later clung to, and had completed his experimental stage. In *The Spy* (1821) American fiction may be said to have come of age with a tale of the recent Revolution. Love of country is its theme, and its hero a spy who had served John Jay against the British, as Jay himself had told Cooper, with singular purity of motive. The share of historical fact in it, indeed, is not large, but the action takes place so near to great events that the characters are all invested with something of the dusky light of heroes, while the figure of Washington, disguised as Mr. Harper and yet always looming gigantically through his disguise, moves among the other personages like a half-

suspected god. Such a quality in the novel might have gone with impossible partiality for the Americans had not Cooper's wife belonged to a family which had been loyalist during the struggle for independence. As it was, Cooper made his loyalists not necessarily knaves and fools, and so secured a fairness of tone which, aside from the mere question of justice, has a large effect upon the art of the narrative. It is clear the British are enemies worth fighting. Perhaps by chance, Cooper here hit upon a type of plot at which he excelled, a struggle between contending forces, not badly matched, arranged as a pursuit in which the pursued are, as a rule, favored by author and reader. In the management of such a device Cooper's invention, which was naturally great and now was thoroughly aroused, worked easily, and the flights of Birch from friend and foe alike exhibit a power to carry on plots with sustained sweep which belongs to none but the masters of narration. To rapid movement Cooper added the virtue of a very real setting. He knew Westchester, where his scene was laid, the "Neutral Ground" of the Revolution, as Scott knew his own border; the topography of *The Spy* is drawn with a firm and accurate hand. In the characters Cooper was not so successful — by strict canons of realism was not successful at all. Cherishing already an aristocratic and traditional conception of women, he accepted for his narrative the romantic ideals of the day, the ideals of Scott and Byron. Writing of violent events in which, of necessity, ladies could play but a small part, he cast his heroines into the straightest mold of helplessness and propriety. With the less sheltered classes, such as were represented by Betty Flanagan

the sutler, Cooper could be more veracious. Of the men who appear in *The Spy*, most are mere gentlemen, mere heroes, although Captain Lawton, the Virginia dragoon, is drawn with spirit and truth, and here and there among the inferior soldiers and the slaves appear a few individual characteristics. Harvey Birch, however, peddler and patriot, outwardly no hero at all and yet surpassingly heroic of soul as he prowls about on his subtle errands, is memorable and arresting. The skill with which he is presented, gaunt, weather-beaten, canny, mysterious, should not conceal the fact that his patriotism is actually as supernatural as are the dæmonic impulses of Brown's characters. Patriotism drives Birch relentlessly to his destiny, at once wrecking and honoring him. This same romantic fate condemns him to be sad and lonely, a dedicated soul who captures attention by his secrecy and holds it by his magnificent adventures. All this is pure romance, but it is romance extraordinarily realized.

Cooper's imagination, having worked first upon Revolutionary material and having succeeded with an historical romance which won the loudest applause, was approved on the American stage, and promptly reached European readers, now turned with characteristic energy in another direction, to the matter of the Frontier. *The Pioneers*, with a bumptious, challenging preface, was published early in 1823. Technically this book made no advance upon *The Spy*. Cooper had only the method of improvisation, then or later. With a few characters and the outlines of a situation in mind, he began composition, perhaps not even aware what the outcome would be, and then found himself swept forward with impetuous haste. In one

respect *The Pioneers* falls behind its predecessors in interest: it has no definite scheme of pursuit and flight, and consequently, though it has certain thrilling moments, no general suspense. But in another respect it was a more important experiment than *The Spy:* now for the first time Cooper had set himself to the realistic representation of American manners. Dealing as he did with the Otsego settlement where his boyhood had been spent, and with a time (1793) partly within his memory, he could write largely with his eye upon the fact. Whatever romance there is in the story lies less in its plot, which is a conventional story of a worthy line for the moment dispossessed but eventually to be restored again; or in its characters, which are, for the most part, studied under a dry light with a good deal of caustic judgment — less in these things than in the essential wonder of a pioneer life. In its costumes and gestures the novel is not as heroic as *The Spy.* Indian John, the last of his proud race, is old and broken, corrupted by the settlements; only his death dignifies him. Natty Bumppo, a composite from many Cooperstown suggestions but in his main outlines undoubtedly suggested by Daniel Boone, is nobler than Indian John because he has not yielded but carries into the deeper forest his virtues, which even in Cooper's boyhood were becoming archaic along the New York frontier, and now in 1823 had become a legend. Natty stands as a protest, on behalf of simplicity and perfect freedom, against encroaching law and order. In *The Pioneers* he is not of the proportions which he later assumed, and only at the end, when he withdraws from the field of his defeat by civilization, does he make his full

appeal; but he is of the tribe of heroes to which Harvey Birch had belonged, lowly men of lofty virtues.

At the time Cooper seems to have seen no larger possibilities in his pioneer than in his spy. He was still experimenting. *The Pilot*, later in 1823, took him to another region of the frontier which he knew — the sea. The instigating motive was his desire to surpass Scott's *Pirate* in seamanship, but his imagination caught fire no less remarkably than when he had decided to write a purely American tale of heroism or to make a record of his youthful environment. Like *The Spy*, his new novel made use of the Revolutionary matter; like *The Pioneers*, it was full of realistic detail from his own experience. Not only did he outdo Scott in sheer accuracy, but he created a new literary type, the tale of adventure on the sea, in which, though he was to have many followers in almost every modern language, he has not been seriously surpassed for vigor and swift rush of narrative. Smollett had already discovered the racy humors of seamen, but it remained for Cooper to capture for fiction the mystery and beauty, the shock and thrill of the sea. Experts say that his technical knowledge was sound; what is more important, he wrote, in *The Pilot*, a story about sailing vessels which convinces landsmen even in days of steam. The novel has, of course, its conventional element: its hero, John Paul Jones, who is always dark and secret, always Byronic, always brooding upon a dark past and a darker fate. As in the earlier stories, much is made of chase and escape, complicated by the fact that here ships, not merely men or horses, must be manœuvered, in a time of bitter war, among the rocks and storms of the Scottish

coast. And once more, too, the central personage is a democratic hero, Long Tom Coffin, of Nantucket, who lives and dies by the sea which has made him, as love of country made Harvey Birch and love of the forest made Natty Bumppo. Long Tom is as real as an oak; he is also as romantic as storms and tides. Thus at the outset of his career Cooper made clear his conviction — one of the most important of all the convictions which lie back of his work — that character is shaped by occupation. Aristocratic though he might be in his own prejudices, he understood the rich diversities which may be brought into fiction by the representation of men drawn from different callings, which, more than different ages or landscapes, produce differences among men.

These three successes made Cooper a national figure, though New England, where criticism was solemn, still condescended to him. He founded the Bread and Cheese Club in New York, a literary society of which he was the moving spirit; he took a prominent part in the reception of Lafayette, who returned to a magnificent welcome in 1824; in the same year Columbia College made Cooper honorary Master of Arts. In the excitement of being a national romancer, he planned a series of Legends of the Thirteen Republics, aimed to celebrate each of the original states, but he gave up his scheme after *Lionel Lincoln* (1825), dealing with Boston in the days of Bunker Hill, failed to please as his earlier novels had done. His account of the battle is in his best vein; but for the rest, Cooper was too unsympathetic toward the New England character and, in spite of all his research, too little at home in Massachusetts for his imagination to be inflamed

by this material. Beguiling as his conception of the series was, Cooper was not fitted, by breadth either of knowledge or of temper, to succeed in it; and his initial failure seems his ultimate good fortune. His future did not lie along the path of history which he had taken in *The Spy*, but along the path of frontier adventure which he had strayed into with *The Pioneers*.

The persuasion of friends led him to resume his narrative of Natty Bumppo, and in Cooper's next two years and his next two novels he reached probably the highest point of his career. With *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) he undertook to show the days of Natty's prime, and with *The Prairie* (1827) his old age and final end. In each case Cooper projected the old hunter out of the world of remembered Otsego, into the dark forest which was giving up its secrets to the ax and the plow in 1793, or into the mighty prairies which stretched, in Cooper's mind's eye, for endless miles behind the forest, another mystery and another refuge. Natty, called Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans*, no longer has the hardness which marred his disgruntled age in *The Pioneers*. He appears instead as erect, swift, shrewd, contented, and wise. With all his virtues of hand and head he combines a nobility of spirit which the woods have fostered in a mind never spoiled by contact with human meanness and injustice. He has grown nobler as he has grown more remote from quarreling Otsego, more the poet and the hero as the world in which he moves has become more wholly his own. Chingachgook has undergone even a greater change, has got back all the cunning and pride which had been deadened in that victim of civilization, Indian John. Both Hawk-

eye and Chingachgook are of course considerably limited by their former conduct in *The Pioneers:* one must still be the canny reasoner, the other a little saddened with the passing years. The purest romance of the tale lies in Uncas, the forest's youngest son, gallant, skilful, courteous, a lover for whom there is no hope, the last of the proud race of the Mohicans. That Uncas was idealized Cooper then and always freely admitted; Homer, he suggested, had his heroes. And it is clear that upon Uncas were bestowed the standard virtues which the philosophers of the age had taught the world to find in a state of nature. Still, after a century many can smile upon the state of nature who are yet able to find in Uncas the perennial appeal of youth cut off in the flower. The action and the setting of the novel are on the same imaginative plane with the characters. The forest, in which all its events take place, surrounds them with a changeless majesty, a venerable calm, a depth of significance that sharpens, by contrast, the restless sense of danger. Pursuit makes almost the whole plot. The pursued party moving from Fort Edward to Fort William Henry has two girls to handicap its flight and to increase the tragedy of its capture. Later the girls have been captured, and sympathy passes, a thing unusual in Cooper, to the pursuing rescuers. In these tasks Hawkeye and the Mohicans are opposed by the fierce capacity of the Huron Magua, who plays villain to Uncas's hero, in physical qualities Uncas's match, in moral qualities his opposite. There is never any relaxation of suspense, though there are certain preeminent moments which belong with the most thrilling episodes in fiction.

The Prairie has less swiftness than *The Last of the Mohicans* but more poetry. In it Natty appears again, twenty years older than in *The Pioneers*, far away in the plains beyond the Mississippi, where the popular mind knew that Daniel Boone had recently died. Natty owns his defeat and he still grieves over the murdered forest, but he has given up anger for the peace of old age. To him it seems that all his virtues are gone. Once valiant he must now be crafty; his arms are feeble; his eyes have so far failed him that, no longer the perfect marksman, he has sunk to the calling of a trapper. There is a pathos in his resignation which would be too painful were it not merely a phase of his grave and noble wisdom. He is more than ever what Cooper called him, "a philosopher of the wilderness." The only change is that he has left the perils and delights of the forest and has been subdued to the eloquent monotony of the plains. Nowhere else has Cooper shown such sheer imaginative power as in the handling of this mighty landscape. He had never seen a prairie; indeed, it is clear that, like many travelers before him, he thought of the prairie as an ocean of land and described it partly by analogy. But he managed to endow the huge empty distances he had not seen with a presence as haunting as that of the populous forest he had intimately known in his impressionable youth. And the old trapper, though he thinks of himself as an exile, has learned the secret of the new scene and seems naturally to belong to it. It is his knowledge that makes him essential to the action, which is again made up of flight and pursuit. Once more there are girls to be rescued, from fiercer white men as well as from fierce Indians. There is

another Magua in the Sioux Mahtoree, another Uncas in the Pawnee Hard-Heart. These Indians ride horses; the flat prairies afford few places of concealment. But the trapper is as ready as ever with new arts, and the flight ends as romance prescribes. The final scene, the death of the trapper in the arms of his young friends, is very touching and fine, yet reticently handled. Thackeray imitated it in the famous death of Colonel Newcome. For the most part, the minor characters, the lovers and the pedant, are not new to Cooper and are not notable. The family of Ishmael Bush, the squatter, however, make up a new element, as realistic as the rougher sort in *The Pioneers*, but more sinister, more important in Cooper's criticism of the frontier. Bush and his giant sons have been forced out of civilization by its virtues, as the trapper by its vices. They have strength without nobility and activity without wisdom. Except when aroused they are as sluggish as a prairie river, and like it they appear muddy and aimless. Ishmael Bush always conveys the impression of terrific forces lying vaguely in ambush. His wife is nearly the most memorable figure among Cooper's women. She clings to her mate and cubs with a tigerish instinct that leaves her, when she has lost son and brother and retreats dumbly from the scene in a vast silent grief, still lingering in the mind, a shabby, inarticulate prairie Hecuba.

The Last of the Mohicans and *The Prairie*, and the praise they won, did not convince Cooper that the frontier was his true province. His next novel, *The Red Rover* (1828), written in France, turned to the noisy Atlantic between New England and the West Indies. Feeling that he must take care in writing of nautical affairs to avoid

the themes and characters preferred by Smollett, Cooper was at some pains to invent all his details "without looking for the smallest aid from traditions or facts." His plot, however, follows the romantic mode: an imperial-souled hero, wounded in his sensibilities, has long been a successful pirate under the scarlet flag, but, in spite of his evil deeds, has so much conscience left that he can be converted in a dramatic moment, subsequently to expiate his sins by services to the Revolution. This story could not have made *The Red Rover* one of Cooper's best tales. There must be taken into account also the solid basis of reality exhibited in the book's seamanship and, less remarkably, in the characters of the old tar Dick Fid and the slave Scipio Africanus. The excitement is less sustained than in *The Pilot*, but portions of the narrative, particularly those dealing with storms, are tremendous. The ocean here plays as great a part as Cooper had lately assigned to the prairie. One voices the calm of nature, the other its tumult; both tend to the shaping and discipline of man. If the theme of *The Red Rover* is conventional, so is that of *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1829), an episode of King Philip's War, in which frontier material indeed appears but in which it is overmuch involved with colonial history and with Cooper's anti-Puritan prejudices.

What may be called his first period had come decisively to an end. Since 1826, when he went with his family to Europe for a foreign residence of seven years, Cooper had been growing steadily more critical and less romantic. His universe was enlarging. He found his books well known in Europe and society disposed to make much of

him. In Paris he fraternized with Scott, who enjoyed and approved his American rival. Parts of Cooper's stay were in England, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, which delighted and astonished him, and Italy, which he loved. Most of his time, however, he passed at Paris, charmed with a gayer and more brilliant society than he had known before. At first his nationalism was intensified. Unabashedly, outspokenly American, he had obtained from Henry Clay the post of consul at Lyons, that he might not seem, during his travels, a man without a country. As consul, though his position was purely nominal, he felt called upon to resent the ignorance everywhere shown by Europeans regarding his native land, and he set himself the task of educating them in sounder views. Cooper was not Franklin. *Notions of the Americans* (1828), while full of information and a rich mine of American opinion for that day, was too obviously partizan to convince those at whom it was aimed. Its proper audience was homesick Americans. He indulged, too, in some controversy at Paris over the relative cost of French and American government which pleased neither nation. Finally, he applied his art to the problem and wrote three novels "in which American opinion should be brought to bear on European facts." That is, in *The Bravo* (1831), *The Heidenmauer* (1832), and *The Headsman* (1833) he meant to show by proper instances the superiority of democracy to aristocracy as regards general happiness and justice. He claimed to be writing for his countrymen alone, some of whom, in that day of one-sided comparisons between Europe and America, must have been thrilled to come across a passage like

"a fairer morning never dawned upon the Alleghanies than that which illumined the Alps"; but he was not sufficiently master of his material, stout as his opinions might be, to make good romances out of it.

He had, however, caught the contagion of the critical spirit, and he returned to New York in 1833 in no mood to lend his voice to the loud chorus of national self-approval then sounding. He found himself, in fact, fatally cosmopolitan in the republic he had been justifying from abroad for seven years. He sought to qualify too sweeping praise of America precisely as he had recently sought to qualify too sweeping censure in Europe. But he had not learned tact while becoming a citizen of the world, and he promptly angered the public he had only meant to correct. The result was the long and dreary wrangling which clouded the whole remainder of his life and has obscured his fame even to the present day. If he had attended the dinner planned in his honor on his return, he might have found his welcome warmer than he thought it. If he had been an observer at once keen and tolerant enough, he must have seen that the new phases of democracy which he disliked under the presidency of Andrew Jackson were in large measure a gift to the old seaboard of that very frontier of which Cooper had been painter and annalist. But he did not see these things, and so he carried on a steady fight, almost always as right in his contentions as he was wrong in his manner. From Cooperstown, generally his residence except for a few winters in New York, to the end of his life he lectured and scolded. His *Letter to his Countrymen* (1834), stating his position, and *The Monikins* (1835),

an unbelievably dull satire, were the first fruits of his quarrel. He followed these with five books dealing with his European travels and constantly irritating to both continents. He indulged in a heated altercation with his fellow-townsmen over some land which they thought theirs, though it was certainly his. In 1838 he published a fictitious record, *Homeward Bound* and its sequel *Home as Found*, of the disappointment of some Americans who return from Europe with a passion like that with which he had recently returned, and who find America what he had found it; but he appears not to have realized that the colossal priggishness of his returning Americans would make them seem more obnoxious than any qualities he could expose in the Americans at large. With something of the same tactlessness he proclaimed his political philosophy and principles in *The American Democrat* (1838). Most spectacular of all, he declared war upon the newspapers of New York and went up and down the state suing those that had libeled him. He won most of the suits, but though he silenced his opponents he had put his fame into the hands of persons who, unable to abuse him, could at least neglect him.

All these controversies checked Cooper's tendency away from romance and toward realism. How strong that tendency was few of his critics have remarked; as a matter of fact, certain of his latest novels — such as *Afloat and Ashore*, *Wyandotté*, *Satanstoe* — are packed with the most valuable information concerning the manners, opinions, speech, and costumes of their periods. But with Cooper, to be critical was too often to be contentious, and as a result those very novels and others still more largely

abound in prejudices and arguments that continually break the strong current of romantic narrative or disturb the broad picture of reality. All his better achievements after 1830 came on those occasions when he could escape from contemporary New York to the ocean or to the old frontier. The ocean was an important relief. In 1839 he published his solid and long-standard *History of the Navy of the United States*, and followed it with various naval biographies. The *History*, indeed, led to a furious legal battle, but generally Cooper left his quarrels behind him when he went upon the sea. As a cosmopolitan, he felt freer on the public highway of the nations. His novels of this period and theme are uneven in merit. *The Two Admirals* (1842) contains one of his best naval battles; *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842) ranks high among his sea tales, richly romantic and glowing with the splendors of the Mediterranean, and yet charged with the theological bigotry which latterly possessed Cooper. The two parts of *Afloat and Ashore* (1844), dealing powerfully as they do with the evils of impressment, are notable also for sea fights and chases. And the inland frontier was quite as much a relief. *Wyandotté* (1843), its scene on the upper Susquehanna, and its subject the siege of a block house, though clumsily told is full of interesting matter. *The Oak Openings* (1848), fruit of a journey which Cooper made to the West in 1847, is a tale of bee-hunting and Indian fighting on Lake Michigan which has not deserved to be so much obscured as it has been by his greatest frontier stories.

Obscured it and its fellows have been, however, by *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841), which he

turned aside long enough to write in the midst of his hottest litigation. The forest even more than the ocean was for Cooper a romantic sanctuary, as it was for Pathfinder the true temple, full of the "holy calm of nature," the teacher of beauty, virtue, laws. Returning to these solemn, dim woods Cooper was subdued once more to the spirit which had attended his first great days. The fighting years through which he had passed had made him more critical, but so had they made him more mellow in the hours when he could forget his daily conflicts. He had now gone far enough from the original conception of Leather-Stocking to become aware of traits which should be brought out or explained. It was too late to make his hero entirely consistent for the series, but Cooper apparently saw the chance to fill out the general outline, and he did it with such skill that those who read the five novels in the order of events will notice relatively few discrepancies, since *The Deerslayer* prepares for nearly all that follows. In *The Pathfinder*, undertaken to show Natty in love and to combine the forest and a ship in the same tale, Cooper took unusual pains to point out how Pathfinder's candor, self-reliance, justice, and fidelity have been developed by the life he has led in the forest. Leather-Stocking, more talkative than before, may not seem more conscious of his special gifts, but Cooper does. Again there is abundant action: another flight through the woods with a timorous maiden, somewhat too nearly resembling the flight in *The Last of the Mohicans;* another siege at a block house, very much like that in *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* and *Wyandotté;* and the more novel element of a storm on

Lake Ontario which calls for a seamanship quite different from that learned on salt water. A romancer less realistic than Cooper might have shown Pathfinder behaving on shipboard with the masterful competence he had on land; but Cooper did not. A romancer more sentimental than Cooper, too, would hardly have dared to let Pathfinder love the heroine in vain; but Cooper did. Even though it is with a somewhat grandiose gesture that Pathfinder is made to surrender the young girl to a more suitable lover of her own choice, much more than a gesture was in Cooper's mind. He was drawing a sharp, true line around Pathfinder's character. Marriage would have domesticated the scout, whereas this sacrifice restores him to the forest solitude in which he essentially belongs.

For the final book of the series, *The Deerslayer*, Cooper could do nothing less than to undertake the hard task of representing the scout in the fresh morning of his youth. Love appears in this story also, but Deerslayer, unable to love a girl who has been corrupted by the settlements, even though Judith Hutter seems the most real and desirable of all Cooper's heroines, turns to the forest with his best devotion. He is naïve, friendly, virtuous with the engaging awkwardness of twenty, bound with a boy's affection to his companion and brother-in-arms, the young Chingachgook. The book is the tale of Natty's coming of age. Already a hunter, he here kills his first man and thus enters the long career which lies before him. That career, however, had already been traced by Cooper, and the distress with which Deerslayer realizes that he has human blood on his hands, becomes, in the light of his future, immensely eloquent. It gives the figure of the man

almost a new dimension; one remembers the many deaths Natty has yet to deal. In other matters he is nearer his later self, for he starts life with a steady if simple philosophy which, through all his many adventures, keeps him to the end the son of nature he was at the beginning. Not a little of the charm of *The Deerslayer* arises from Cooper's evident delight in the large, bland landscapes of the exquisite neighborhood of Cooperstown and Lake Otsego, here called Glimmerglass; in this same neighborhood Natty Bumppo had first revealed himself to his creator's imagination nearly a score of years before.

"If anything from the pen of the writer of these romances is at all to outlive himself," Cooper declared, "it is, unquestionably, the series of 'The Leather-Stocking Tales.'" The truth of this prophecy steadily increases. At present the series is accepted as the quintessence of his achievement, and Leather-Stocking by any large ballot — both national and international — would be voted the most eminent of all American characters of fiction. "The spirit of Leather-Stocking is awake," said a French statesman in the spring of 1917, meaning that the United States had entered the World War, and by his remark surprising a good many Americans who had not realized how clearly Leather-Stocking still seems to the rest of the world a symbol of America. In Cooper's most definite summary, Natty was "simple-minded, faithful, utterly without fear, and yet prudent, foremost in all warrantable enterprises, or what the opinion of the day considered as such. . . . The most surprising peculiarity about the man himself was the entire indifference with which he regarded all distinctions that did not depend on

personal merit. . . . His feelings appeared to possess the freshness and nature of the forest in which he passed so much of his time, and no casuist could have made clearer decisions in matters relating to right and wrong; yet he was not without his prejudices, which, though few, and colored by the character and usages of the individual, were deep-rooted, and had almost got to form a part of his nature. . . . In short . . . he was a fair example of what a just-minded and pure man might be, while untempted by unruly or ambitious desires, and left to follow the bias of his feelings, amid the solitary grandeur and ennobling influences of a sublime nature." Nature in America is no longer so solitary, and perhaps no longer so ennobling, but much of this older simplicity, downrightness, courage, competence, unsophistication, and virgin prejudice still marks the national type. No wonder then that generation after generation of American boys have read these romances as they have read no others. No wonder, either, that boys of other nations and races have admired in Leather-Stocking qualities generously transcending merely national ones. Cooper's failure to write a sixth novel, as he at one time planned, which should show Natty in the Revolution, may be taken as a sign that he felt the difficulty of endowing the scout with the virtue of patriotism in the partizan degree which must have been demanded from that hero in that day and which would surely have been alien to the cool philosopher of the woods. Justice, not partizanship, is Leather-Stocking's essential trait: justice as conceived, somewhat out of space and out of time, by the universal spirit of youth. Being so universal, Leather-Stocking has naturally too simple a soul to

call for minute analysis, and needs no more than the opportunity, which Cooper gave him, to move through a long succession of events aimed to display his valor and test his virtues. There was thus produced the panorama of the American frontier which at once became and has remained the classic record of an heroic age.

The classic record of an heroic age! — although not classic at all in the stricter sense of fidelity to all the circumstances of the frontier. And yet in spite of the many charges that have been brought against Cooper's accuracy, charges well founded and well proved, his fame holds steadily up. He may not have recorded his universe at all points exactly, but he created one. His mighty landscapes lie still unshaken in a secure district of the human imagination. Over such mountains through such dim and terrifying forests to such glorious lakes the mind still marches, for the moment convinced. His Indians, whatever their authenticity, are securely established in the world's romantic memory as a picture of those belated and unfortunate men of the stone age who were fated to oppose the ruthless advance of a more complex civilization. It is to the credit of mankind that those naked savages, unjustly as they were dealt with while alive, should be a little honored with a chivalrous reputation when dead or conquered. In this manner all high-minded peoples remember their ancient defeated enemies. And recent studies of the art and ritual of the Indians have gone far toward showing that the race possessed, if not precisely the qualities Cooper ascribed to them, at least a fineness and elevation of mind which are worlds closer to Cooper's representation of them than to the picture as corrected

by those subsequent critics who called the Indians mere squalid savages. That Natty Bumppo, to the contemporary eye doubtless hard and crude enough, should have been made a hero is no more remarkable than that the same fortune should have come to Daniel Boone or Robinson Crusoe, plain men who like Natty clung to the dearest human virtues in the face of a nature which would as readily have destroyed as dignified them. And finally, the unending charm of these diversified adventures inheres not only in the narrative itself but in the human disposition which cherishes memories and hopes of a larger experience, free, abundant, glorious, and on but casual provocation will follow a great story-teller to the ends of the earth.

The Pathfinder and *The Deerslayer* seem to have left Cooper nearly exhausted, for his last decade saw him rise but once above the sensationalism which always menaced the romancers of his school and the contentiousness to which he himself was prone. Most of the novels of the period do not deserve even to be called by name. He had still enough energy, however, to undertake and to complete his trilogy of Littlepage Manuscripts, *Satanstoe* (1845), *The Chainbearer* (1845), and *The Redskins* (1846). Having tried the autobiographical method with Miles Wallingford in *Afloat and Ashore,* Cooper now repeated it through three generations of a New York family. In the last he involved himself in the question of anti-rentism then stirring — of course fiercely on the side of the landlords — and produced a book both fantastic and dull; the second is better by one of Cooper's most powerful figures, the squatter Thousandacres, another backwoods

Titan of the breed of Ishmael Bush; the first, if a little beneath Cooper's best work, is so only because he was never at his best except when he dealt with Leather-Stocking and his fortunes. No other novel by Cooper, or by any other writer, gives so firm and convincing a picture of colonial New York, when Pinkster, the annual holiday of the slaves, was still a great day in Manhattan and at Albany the Patroon still kept up something like baronial state. Even Cooper has no more exciting struggle than that of Corny Littlepage with the icy Hudson. But the special virtue of *Satanstoe* is a quality Cooper nowhere else displays, a positive winsomeness in the way Littlepage unfolds his memories (now sweetened by many years) and his humorous crotchets in the same words. Unfortunately Cooper did not carry this vein further. With his family and a few friends he lived his latter days in honor and affection, but he held the public at a sour distance, and before his death in 1851 set his face against a reconciliation even in the future by forbidding any biography to be authorized. The published facts of his life leave his personality less known to the general world than that of any other American writer of equal rank.

This might be somewhat strange, since Cooper was lavish of intrusions into his novels, were it not that he wrote himself down, when he spoke in his own person, as not only a powerful and independent man but also a scolding, angry man, and thus made his most revealing novels his most forbidding ones. One thinks of Scott, who when he shows himself most wins most love. The difference further characterizes the two men. In breadth of sympathies, humanity, geniality, humor, Cooper is less

than Scott. He himself, in his review of Lockhart, said that Scott's great ability lay in taking a legend or historical episode, such as Scotland furnished in a splendid profusion that Cooper envied, and reproducing it with marvelous grace and tact. "This faculty of creating a *vraisemblance*, is next to that of a high invention, in a novelist." It is clear that Cooper felt his own inferiority to Scott in "creating a *vraisemblance*" and that he was always conscious of the relative barrenness of American life; it is also tolerably clear that he himself aimed at what he thought the higher quality of invention. Of Leather-Stocking Cooper specifically said: "In a physical sense, different individuals known to the writer in early life certainly presented themselves as models, through his recollections; but in a moral sense this man of the forest is purely a creation." Cooper's invention, however, though his highest claim to greatness, is not without a solid basis; he is not to be neglected as an historian. No man better sums up in fiction the older type of republican — rather than democrat — which established the United States. No one — unless possibly Irving — fixed the current heroic conditions of his day more firmly to actual places. Though Cooper might have supplied more facts to the great legend of the frontier, no one else supplied so many. Certainly it was his superior technical knowledge of ships and sailors which helped him to write such sea tales as give him, in that province of romance, still a high rank among many followers. True, Cooper had not Scott's resources of historical learning to fall back upon when his invention flagged, any more than he had Scott's good-nature when he became involved in argument; but when

his invention escaped from the world of settled customs on which Scott's art was built up, Cooper did with his invention alone what Scott, with his subsidiary qualities, could not outdo. After all else that can be said, one returns to Cooper's invention, which is almost supreme among romancers, and which lifts him solidly above all his faults of clumsiness, prolixity, conventional characterizations, and ill-temper. Merely the multiplication of incidents could not have preserved him. Merely his good fortune in being first to celebrate the frontier would not have been enough. There had to be in him that intensity by virtue of which he so completely realized imagined, and often imaginary, events. How far this quality of his raises the quality of his invention may be observed in certain of his "recognition" scenes — scenes of that kind which Aristotle considered to be of the very essence of dramatic effect. Uncas revealing himself to the Delawares, the old trapper discovered on the prairie by the grandson of his former comrade — surely Euripides, had he been a writer of hasty prose romances, need not have been ashamed of scenes like these.

CHAPTER III

ROMANCES OF ADVENTURE

1. Materials and Men

Viewed historically Cooper emerges from among his contemporaries as perhaps few of them realized he would after a century. Every one of the great matters of his day — the Settlement, the Revolution, the Frontier on land and water — he touched with a masterly hand, and in essential popularity he long ago distanced all his rivals. It is of course mere coincidence that he was born in the year which produced *The Power of Sympathy* and that when he died *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was passing through its serial stage; yet the limits of Cooper's life do mark almost exactly the first large period of American fiction; Neal, Thompson, Paulding, Kennedy, Simms, Melville — to mention no slighter figures — outlived him, but not, as a current fashion, the type of romance which had flourished under Cooper. Although by 1851 tales of adventure, as Cooper and his school conceived adventure, had begun to seem antiquated, they had rendered a large service to the course of literature: they had removed the stigma, for the most part, from the word "novel." For the brutal scrapes of eighteenth-century fiction the new romance, of Scott and Cooper, had substituted deeds of chivalrous doings; it had supplanted the blunt fleshliness of Fielding

and Smollett by a chaste and courtly love. Familiar life, tending to sordidness and "low" settings, had been succeeded by remote life, generally idealized; historical detail had been brought in to instruct readers who were being entertained, not without some sense of guilt in their entertainment. Cooper, like Scott, was more realistic than the Gothic romancers, more human than Godwin or Brown. The two most common charges against the older fiction, that it pleased wickedly and that it taught nothing, had broken down before the discovery, except in illiberal sects, that the novel is fitted for both honest use and pleasure.

In Europe, at Cooper's death, a new vogue of realism had set in, but America still had little but romance. The presence of the frontier as a contemporary fact as well as a matter of fiction accounts for this condition quite as much as does the absence at the time of any strong realistic bent among American writers. With that vast, mysterious hinterland free to any one who might come to take it, novelists, like farmers, were less prompt in America than in Europe to settle down to the intensive cultivation of known fields. There is a closer analogy, indeed, between the geographic and the imaginative frontier of the United States than has generally been realized. As the first advanced, thin, straggling, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, widening from Canada to Mexico, and reaching out in ships, the other followed, also thin and straggling but with an incessant purpose to find out new territories which the imagination could play over and claim for its own. "Until now," wrote Cooper in 1828, "the Americans have been tracing the outline of their great na-

tional picture. The work of filling up has just seriously commenced." He had in mind only the physical process, but his image applies as well to that other process in which he was the most effective pioneer. Two years after his death the outline of the national picture, at least of contiguous territory, was established, and the nation gave itself to the problem of occupation. In fiction, too, after the death of Cooper, the main tendency for nearly a generation was away from the conquest of new borders to the closer cultivation, east of the Mississippi, of ground already marked.

As late as 1825 Jared Sparks thought ten American novels a striking output for one year, but during the second quarter of the century Cooper had many helpers in his task. For the most part they were more limited than he to particular sections. In New England, John Neal, D. P. Thompson, and Sylvester Judd had already set outposts before Hawthorne, at first a writer of short stories, came definitely with his greater novels to capture that section for classic ground. Paulding assisted Cooper in New York, and took Swedish Delaware for himself; for Pennsylvania, Bird was Brown's chief successor; Maryland had Kennedy; Virginia, without many native novels, began to undergo, in the hands of almost every romancer who dealt with either the Settlement or the Revolution, that idealization which has made it, especially since the Civil War, the most romantic of American states; South Carolina passed into the pages of Simms; Georgia and the lower South brought forth a school of native humorists who abounded in the truth as well as in the fun of that border; the Mississippi and the Ohio advanced to a

place in the imagination with the Hudson, the Susquehanna, the Potomac, and the James. North of the Ohio romance achieved comparatively little and the epic of the Great Lakes remained — as indeed it still remains — unsung; but on the southern bank of the Ohio, Kentucky, "dark and bloody ground," rivaled its mother Virginia. Bird ventured into Mexico at a time when Irving and Prescott were writing romantic histories of the Spanish discovery and conquest. Melville, the most original and enduring of Cooper's contemporaries, concerned himself with the wonders of the Pacific and the deeds of Yankee whalers. Nor did the romancers of the period confine themselves entirely to native borders and native ships, though the exceptions are relatively unimportant: various narratives by various narrators of the life and voyages of Columbus; the African tales of Mayo; the one story of classical antiquity, Mrs. Child's gentle, ignorant *Philothea* (1836); the Biblical romances of William Ware; and George Tucker's satirical *Voyage to the Moon* (1827).

The topographical arrangement is the natural arrangement of this body of romance, for as regards style, method, attitude toward the American past, present, future, general criticism of life, or individual distinction, the different novels exhibit but in rare cases any such qualities as would make classification significant or even possible. Again medieval France furnishes a parallel in the *chansons de geste*, which differ from these old American romances in little besides their anonymity and their meter. Were the names of the American authors transposed it would be noticed, if at all, only by experts. Almost all of these tales employ a more or less standardized idiom and ter-

minology, tending to the heroic and inflated in the dialogue and to the verbose in narrative and description. Swift improvisation underlies the method, with a large but heedless handling of groups of characters and blocks of material, and with Providence and coincidence involved as lightly as in the most romantic ages. Although there is a strangely monotonous plethora of incident, the plots play continual variations upon a few themes and personages. In those dealing with the matter of the Revolution the war against the British never slackens; nor in those dealing with the Settlement and the Frontier, the war against the stubborn aborigines. Types of character are strongly opposed and slightly shaded, as suits an atmosphere habitually tinged with conflict. Children hardly exist on the scene, and the women rarely rise above the pretty and elegant and helpless except when now and then one of them assumes the virago, often with comic effect. So far as the characters have a psychology, it is restricted to a few single motives: with the women, a passive readiness to be wooed, a meek endurance of husbands, and a tearful solicitude for children — again except for the viragoes, who anticipate their suitors, nag their husbands, and beat or savagely protect their young; with the men, intense patriotism, a burning confidence in the national destiny, a passion for fighting and hardships, considerable insensibility to pain, in themselves and others, which finds expression in stoicism, cruelty, and heavy pranks; and chivalric love remarkably sexless in any but the villains. The moral standards implied belong to conventional ethics, Christianity being professed and war practised in the ordinary modern mixture. While some strained points

of honor appear, especially arising from the codes of the gaming table and the duel, there is little of that casuistry which in the medieval courtly romances plays so large a part. There might be more of it were there not a tolerably constant strain of humor, though more generally the characteristic American "good humor" than wit or comedy. Burlesque frequently shows its head, as a rule in connection with the lower order of characters, who, as with Scott, are more likely to be conceived as amusing than as heroic. Such non-English elements in the population as the Irish, German, and French commonly play comic rôles; the negroes have hardly ever any character but that of faithful slaves; and the Indians stand normally at one extreme or other of the scale — fierce savages to be exterminated without mercy or amiable sons and daughters of nature. Towards history most of the romancers took the attitude that it existed for the edification or for the elevation of their readers, and they did not hesitate to enlarge it at will. On the whole the most realistic elements in the entire tradition are the geography, which almost never becomes hazy and casual as in medieval romance, and the landscape, which, though grandiose and elaborate, is little more so in the novels than it was in fact at a time when the great forests and mountains and prairies of the continent were still immense as compared with the settled regions. A certain largeness about the physical horizons, indeed, went a long way for Cooper's generation, and in the twentieth century still goes a fair distance, toward tempting readers to forget the countless conventional elements in our early fiction. Without their sense of that

largeness these novelists could hardly have possessed the rough narrative enegy which is their highest quality.

Only a few of them need to be specially characterized. John Neal of Maine, the first obvious and confessed imitator of Cooper, when *The Spy* appeared took fire at the example. Neal's real master, however, was Byron, whom he followed with a fury of rant and fustion which would have made him, had he been gifted with taste and humor as well, no mean follower. *The Down-Easters* (1833), though promising at first to be a real picture of native life and character, soon runs amuck into raving melodrama. The Rev. Sylvester Judd in 1845 published a novel, *Margaret*, which Lowell declared had the soul of Down East in it; but the soul of the book has not proved immortal. Written to show that the Unitarians could produce imaginative literature as well as the more orthodox sects, *Margaret* is badly constructed and it wanders, toward the close, into a region of misty transcendentalisms where characters and plot are lost; and yet it has genuine merits in its vivid fidelity to the life of rural Massachusetts just after the Revolution, in its thorough, loving familiarity with the New England temper and scene, and in a kind of spiritual ardor which pervades it throughout. Judge Daniel Pierce Thompson knew the Vermont frontier as Cooper knew that of New York. After many struggles with the bitterest poverty he got to college, studied law, became a prominent official of his native state, and somewhat accidentally took to fiction. Of his half dozen novels, which all possess a good share of honest realism, *Locke Amsden* (1847) gives perhaps the most truth-

ful record of frontier life, but *The Green Mountain Boys* (1839) is the classic of Vermont. It is concerned with the struggles of the Vermonters for independence first from New York and second from Great Britain; its hero is the famous Ethan Allen. Thompson had none of Cooper's poetry and was little concerned with the magic of nature; he took over most of the tricks of the older novelists and their stock types and sentiments. But he made little effort to preach, he could tell a straight story plainly and rapidly, and he touched action with rhetoric in just the proportion needed to sell fifty editions of the book by 1860 and to make it in the twentieth century a standard book for boys — by far the most popular romance of the immediate school of Cooper.

There was a school of Irving, too, which touched the novel. James Kirke Paulding, Irving's friend, had considerable merit as a novelist, particularly in the matter of comedy. He enjoyed burlesque and he laughed at what he called "Blood-Pudding Literature." He was too facile in lending his pen, as parodist or follower, to whatever fashion prevailed at any given moment to do any very individual work, but *The Dutchman's Fireside* (1831), his masterpiece, deserves to be mentioned with Cooper's *Satanstoe*, considerably its superior, as a worthy record of the Settlement along the Hudson; and his *Westward Ho!* (1832) significantly reveals the charm which the West — especially Kentucky, in which the scene of this novel is chiefly laid — had for the natives of the older states. Other writers of Eastern birth, resident for a time in the new settlements, cheerfully or romantically undertook the representation of manners not known to the seaboard.

The wittiest was Caroline Matilda Stansbury Kirkland, a native of New York, who wrote from the Michigan frontier, among other lesser books, *A New Home — Who'll Follow?* (1839), a volume of keen and sprightly letters avowedly in the manner of Miss Mitford, an English imitator of Irving. Still closer to Irving was Judge James Hall of Pennsylvania, who went west in search of adventure, lived in Illinois and Ohio, and by his various literary enterprises served as an interpreter between West and East much as Irving did between America and Europe. Hall's manner is like Irving's in its leisurely, genial narrative, its abundant descriptions, and its affection for supernatural legends which could be handled smilingly. He had real powers of fidelity, the only merit he claimed, to the life he knew, but he had also a florid style and a vein of romantic sentiment which have denied his best book, *The Wilderness and the Warpath* (1846), a permanent vitality. Nearest of all to Irving, however, was his friend and admirer, John Pendleton Kennedy. Of excellent Virginia connections, but born in Baltimore, he served as bloodlessly as Irving in the War of 1812, like him was admitted to the bar, and like him lived merrily thereafter in his native town. His *Red Book* (1818–19) was a Baltimore *Salmagundi* in prose and verse, and his *Swallow Barn* (1832), an amiable and admirable record of life on a Virginia plantation, was a Virginia *Bracebridge Hall*, even to certain incidents and characters which give the effect of having been introduced rather because Kennedy had observed them in Irving than because he had observed them in Virginia. But Kennedy's easy humor and real skill at description and characterization

make the book distinguished in its own right. His later novels, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* (1835), in which he dealt with the Revolution in the Carolinas, and *Rob of the Bowl* (1838), which has its scene laid in colonial Maryland, are nearer Cooper, with the difference that Kennedy depended, as he had done in *Swallow Barn*, on fact not invention for almost all his action as well as for his details of topography and costume. Indeed, he founded the career of Horse-Shoe Robinson upon that of an actual Revolutionary partizan with such care that the man is said later to have approved the record as authentic. Decidedly Kennedy's gift, like Irving's again, was for enriching actual events with a finer grace and culture than the ordinary romancers could command. His style is clear, his methods always simple and rational.

Cooper's closest rival among the romancers of his school was William Gilmore Simms (1806–70) of South Carolina. Born in Charleston, outside the little aristocracy of the town, Simms got but a scanty schooling. He seems, indeed, during his youth to have been as bookish as Charles Brockden Brown, but it was romantic poetry and history which fascinated him, not romantic speculation. From his grandmother he heard innumerable legends of the Revolution, South Carolina's epic age, and cherished them with a poetic and patriotic devotion. When he was eighteen he went to visit his father, who had left Charleston for the West, had become friend and follower of Andrew Jackson, and had settled on a plantation in Mississippi. The young poet was thus shown the manners of a frontier which corresponded, in many ways, to that of Cooper, and he seems, during extended travels, to have observed its rough

comedy and violent melodrama with sharp eyes. But the border — the matter of the Frontier — was not Simms's first love as it had been Cooper's, and the inalienable Carolinian went back, against his father's advice, to the traditions and dreams of Charleston. There he was admitted to the bar, and there he published the first of his many volumes of verse.

It is unnecessary to say more of the miscellaneous literary tasks of Simms than that, somewhat after the fashion of Sir Walter Scott on a smaller scale, he wrote moderate poetry to the end of his life, including three verse tragedies; that he edited the apocryphal plays of Shakespeare; that he produced popular histories of South Carolina and popular biographies of Francis Marion, Captain John Smith, the Chevalier Bayard, and Nathanael Greene; and that he kept up a ceaseless flood of contributions to periodicals. His range of interest and information was large, but he commonly dealt with American, and particularly Southern, affairs. His really significant work, as a romancer, he began in 1833 with a Godwinian tale of crime, *Martin Faber*, which was so well received that he followed it in 1834 with *Guy Rivers* and in 1835 with *The Yemassee*, two romances in which almost the full extent of his powers was thus early displayed. *Guy Rivers*, thoroughly conventional as regards the love affair which makes a part of the plot, is a tale of deadly strife between the laws of Georgia and a fiendish border bandit. A born story-teller, like Cooper, Simms was as casual as Cooper in regard to structure and less careful in regard to style, but he was too rapid to be dull and he revealed to Americans a new section of their ad-

venturous frontier. His concern with colonial South Carolina bore fruit in *The Yemassee*, a moving tale of the Yemassee War of 1715 which has been on the whole his most famous, and which is without much doubt his best, work. Once again Simms took hints from current romances, but when he set himself to describing the rich landscape of South Carolina or to recounting its annals, he was more fully master of his material than in *Guy Rivers* and more admirable in proportion as his subject was more congenial to him. He gave his Indians the dignity and courage which he said they must have had at an earlier period; he invented for them a mythology. But his triumph comes from the bold and truthful variation he here plays upon the theme used by Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Occonestoga, the Uncas of this drama, has been corrupted by contact with the whites and has betrayed his people; Sanutee, his father, like another Brutus, denounces the renegade; Matiwan, his mother, with a more than Roman fortitude, kills him with her own hands to save him from the dishonor which his tribe could inflict only upon a living man. The older American romance has no more dramatic moment. The various white and black characters in *The Yemassee* have somewhat less heroic dimensions than the red, but they are done with great vigor and some realism.

Having succeeded with the matters of the Frontier and the Settlement, Simms now turned to the Revolution and wrote *The Partisan* (1835), designed as the first member of a trilogy which should properly celebrate those valorous times. He later wavered in his scheme, and though he finally called *Mellichampe* (1836) and *Katherine Walton*

(1851) the other members of his trilogy, he grouped round them four more novels that have obvious marks of kinship. *The Partisan* traces events from the fall of Charleston to Gates's defeat at Camden; the action of *Mellichampe*, which is nearly parallel to that of *Katherine Walton*, the proper sequel of *The Partisan*, takes place in the interval between Camden and the coming of Greene; *The Scout*, originally called *The Kinsmen* (1841), illustrates the period of Greene's first victories; *The Sword and the Distaff* (1853), later known as *Woodcraft*, furnishes a kind of comic afterpiece to the series. Simms subsequently returned to the body of his theme and produced *The Forayers* (1855) and its sequel *Eutaw* (1856), to do honor to the American successes of the year 1781. Of these *The Scout* is perhaps the poorest, because of the large admixture of Simms's cardinal defect, horrible melodrama; *Woodcraft* is on many grounds the best, by reason of its close-built plot and the high spirits with which it tells of the pranks and courtship, after the war, of Captain Porgy, the most truly comic character ever produced by this school of American romance. But neither of these works is quite representative of the series; neither has quite the dignity which, lacking in his sensational tales of the border, Simms always imparted to his work when he was most under the spell of the Carolina tradition. That always warmed him; at times he seems drunk with history. He had a tendency to overload his tales with solid blocks of fact derived from his wide researches, forgetting, in his passionate antiquarianism, his own belief that "the chief value of history consists in its proper employment for the purposes of art"; or, rather, he was too much thrilled

by bare events to perceive that they needed to be colored into fiction if they were to fit his narratives. Simms never took his art as a mere technical enterprise. He held that "modern romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic," and his heart beat to be another Homer. His seven novels are his epic of the Revolution. Marion, the Agamemnon of these wars, had already become a legend in the popular memory with the help of Weems's fantastic ardor, but it remained for Simms to show a whole society engaged in Marion's task. The defect of Simms was that he relied too much upon one plot for each of his tales — a partizan and a loyalist contending for the hand of the same girl — and that he repeated certain stock scenes and personages again and again. His virtue was not only that he handled the actual warfare with interest and power but that he managed to multiply episodes with huge fecundity. He described, in a surge of rhetoric, his favorite material: "Partisan warfare, itself, is that irregular and desultory sort of life, which is unavoidably suggestive of the deeds and feelings of chivalry — such as gave the peculiar character, and much of the charm, to the history of the middle ages. The sudden onslaught — the retreat as sudden — the midnight tramp — the moonlight *bivouack* — the swift surprise, the desperate defence — the cruel slaughter and the headlong flight — and, amid the fierce and bitter warfare, always, like a sweet star shining above the gloom, the faithful love, the constant prayer, the devoted homage and fond allegiance of the maiden heart!"

The passage is almost a generalized epitome of his Revolutionary romances. It also betrays the fact that

the epic for Simms lay decidedly nearer to Froissart than to Homer. If he is more sanguinary, he is also more sentimental than Cooper. His women, though Nelly Floyd in *Eutaw* is pathetic and mysterious, and Matiwan in *The Yemassee* is nearly as tragic as romance can make her, are almost all fragile and colorless things. Even more than Cooper, Simms suffered from the pseudo-chivalrous in his Carolina tradition: tediously old-school toward his women, he is also undemocratically "condescending" toward his common men. His comedy is successful only, and then not always, in the words and deeds of the gourmand Porgy. In this respect he clearly surpasses Cooper, whom he equals if not surpasses in the description of landscapes, which in Simms range from the sterile wastes of Georgia to the luxuriant Carolina swamps in which the partizans found a refuge — descriptions full of reality and gusto, but with little emphasis on the "poetry" or "philosophy" of nature.

It was in dealing with the matters of the Revolution and the Settlement, not Cooper's forte, that Simms succeeded best; he was inferior when he dealt with the Frontier. Perhaps the earlier frontier had been intrinsically more dignified than that which Simms had observed; perhaps the difference is that Cooper's had lain deeper under the softening shadow of the past. At any rate, Simms grew more melodramatic, as Cooper grew more poetic, the farther he ventured from regions of law and order. *Richard Hurdis* (1838), *Border Beagles* (1840), *Beauchampe* (1842), and its sequel *Charlemont* (1856) are amazingly sensational — bloody and tearful and barbarously ornate. Nor was Simms happier when he abandoned native for for-

eign history, as in *Pelayo* (1838), *The Damsel of Darien* (1839), *Count Julian* (1845), and *Vasconselos* (1853). Even more than Cooper he lacked judgment as to the true province of his art; like Cooper, he constantly turned aside to put his pen to the service of the distracted times through which he was fated to live. As the agitation which led to civil war grew more heated, he plunged into stormy apologetics for the grounds and virtues of slavery, as passionately tory as Dr. Johnson or Sir Walter Scott. Just on the eve of the struggle Simms repeated the success of *The Yemassee* with a romance of seventeenth-century Carolina, *The Cassique of Kiawah* (1859), a stirring, varied story which, though generally neglected, must be ranked with his best books. The war ruined and broke him, and though he wrote stoutly on till his death in 1870 he never regained his earlier powers or his earlier prestige.

Robert Montgomery Bird of Delaware, in his Mexican romances recalling Irving and in his novels of New Jersey and Pennsylvania nearer to Cooper, has survived solely — and that but dimly — as the author of *Nick of the Woods* (1837), a powerful and exciting tale of the Kentucky frontier in 1782, wherein he attempted to correct Cooper's heroic drawing of the Indian by presenting him as a fierce and filthy savage utterly undeserving of sentimental sympathy. The book celebrates a type of character often spoken of in border annals, the white man who, crazed by Indian atrocities, gave his whole life to a career of ruthless vengeance. As critical a disposition as Bird's rarely appeared outside of Cooper, but it appeared in *The Partisan Leader* (1836) by Judge Nathaniel Beverley Tucker of Virginia, a novel which was made the vehicle

of criticism. Famous chiefly because it prophesied disunion and civil war, the book deserves note also for its classical restraint, its pride, its intense, conscious Virginianism. Distinction of another sort belongs to the Rev. William Ware of Massachusetts, whose *Zenobia* (1837), *Aurelian* (1838), and *Julian* (1841), though strongly biased in favor of the creed Ware preached, and often diffuse and monotonous, have still force and charm enough to be read even in the present day by that considerable share of the population to whom books dealing with the origins of Christianity are equally duty and delight. And there is another distinction still in *Kaloolah* (1849), by William Starbuck Mayo of New York, a romance which contains a strange mixture of satire and romance in its account of an African Utopia visited by the Yankee hero Jonathan Romer.

Besides the novelists who can here be characterized or even named there were, or had been, by 1851 many others whom it would avail little to catalogue: authors for children, authors preaching causes, authors celebrating fashionable or Bohemian life in New York; writers of domestic stories with obvious morals, writers of adventure stories with shudderingly sensational plots. Longfellow lamented the success which attended the flashy labors of Joseph Holt Ingraham. E. Z. C. Judson ("Ned Buntline") and Emerson Bennett began their energetic, sub-literary careers. As the century advanced there was undoubtedly an increase in the amount of trivial fiction produced. The rise of the great Victorian novelists in England was not paralleled in America. Their works in the absence of any copyright could be sold by American publishers more

cheaply than native novels could be with the incumbrance of royalties to the native authors. Some Americans avoided competition by preferring short stories; others, by sinking to a lower level and manufacturing a cheap domestic grade of entertainment. All the more, then, do such figures as Cooper and Simms and Melville emerge from among the minor creatures of the day.

2. Herman Melville

Herman Melville much surpassed Simms and Cooper in boldness and energy of speculation and in richness and beauty of style. A grandson of the conservative old gentleman about whom Holmes wrote *The Last Leaf*, and son of a merchant of New York, Melville was born there in 1819. The early death of his father and the loss of the family fortune having narrowed Melville's chances for higher schooling to a few months in the Albany Classical School, he turned his hand to farming for a year, shipped before the mast to Liverpool in 1837, taught school three years, and in 1841 sailed from New Bedford on a whaling voyage into the Pacific. Upon the experiences of that voyage his principal work is founded. The captain of the *Acushnet*, it seems, treated the crew badly, and Melville, with a companion whom he calls Toby, escaped from the ship to the island of Nukuheva (Nukuhiva) in the Marquesas and strayed into the cannibal valley Typee (Taipi), where the savages kept Melville, Toby having escaped again, four months in an "indulgent captivity." Rescued by an Australian whaler, Melville visited Tahiti and other islands of the Society group, took part in a

mutiny, and once more changed ship, this time setting out for Honolulu. After some months as a clerk in Hawaii he joined the crew of the frigate *United States* and returned by the Horn to Boston in 1844. "From my twenty-fifth year," he told Hawthorne, "I date my life." Why he held 1844 so important is not clear, but it was then that he first thought of authorship. Though he had kept no notes of his journey, within a year he had completed his first book, *Typee*, the record of his captivity. This was followed the next year by *Omoo* (the word is Polynesian for "rover"), which completed his island adventures. In 1849 came *Redburn*, based on his earlier voyage to Liverpool, and in 1850 *White Jacket*, an account of life on a man-of-war.

The first two had a hearty vogue and all of them aroused much wonder as to the proportion of fact and fiction which might have gone into their making. Murray published *Typee* in England under the delusion that it was pure fact. There were others to rank it with Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) as a transcript of real events. But though little is known of Melville's actual doings in the Pacific, it is at least clear that *Typee* and *Omoo* are no more as truthful as *Two Years Before the Mast* than they are as crisp and nautical as that incomparable classic of the sea. Melville must be ranked less with Dana than with George Borrow. If he knew the thin boundary between romance and reality, he was still careless of nice limits, and his work is a fusion which defies analysis. *White Jacket*, of the four books, is probably the nearest a plain record; *Redburn* has but a few romantic elements; but neither can approach the *Typee*-

Omoo series in charm. *Typee* was the earliest notable romance dealing with the South Seas, a region abundantly exploited since. Merely as history the book has real value, with its sympathetic yet sharp-eyed observation of Marquesan customs and its finely colored descriptions. It is, however, of course as fiction that *Typee* has been generally read, as a romance of the life led by a sophisticated man among perilous, lonely, barbaric surroundings. The valley of Typee becomes, in Melville's handling, a region of dreams and languor which stir the senses with the fragrance and color of the landscape and the gay beauty of the brown cannibal girls. And yet Melville, though thoroughly sensitive to the felicities of the exotic life, never loses himself in it entirely as did later men, like Lafcadio Hearn and Pierre Loti, but remains always the shrewd and smiling Yankee. *Omoo* carries Melville through still more cheerful vicissitudes to Tahiti; it is packed with activity and comedy. There is at least the look of reality about his racy sailors, his consuls and beach-combers, and his irresponsible natives hovering between cannibalism and a half-comprehended Christianity. His references to the missionaries led to much controversy with members of their profession, and Melville was, indeed, highly caustic and contemptuous toward them. The tale is dramatic; the teller had just emerged from a world of Edenic simplicity; and his recollection of that little world lends sharpness to his judgments of the tawdry figures he finds on the borders of civilization. Melville was something of a partizan of paradises, as the charm of *Typee* reveals; but *Omoo* takes its quality, its keen edge, not so much from his prejudice as from the comic force and the happi-

ness with which he hits off the manners and personages of a heterogeneous community.

The charge that he had been writing romance led Melville to deserve the accusation deliberately, and he wrote *Mardi* (1849), one of the strangest, maddest books ever composed by an American. As in *Typee*, two sailors escape from a tyrannical captain in the Pacific and seek their fortune on the open sea, where they finally discover the mysterious archipelago of Mardi, a paradise which is more rich and sultry than the Marquesas and which becomes, as the story proceeds, a crazy chaos of adventure and satirical allegory. In *Mardi* for the first time appear those traits which made a French critic call Melville " un Rabelais américain," his welter of language, his fantastic laughter, his tumultuous speculations. He had turned, contemporaries said, from the plain though witty style of his first works to the gorgeous manner of Sir Thomas Browne; he had been infected, say later critics, with Carlylese and the midsummer madness of the New England transcendentalists. Whatever the process, he had surely shifted his interest from the actual to the abstruse and symbolical, and he never recovered from the dive into metaphysics which proved fatal to him as a novelist. It was, however, while on this perilous rim that he produced one of the best of his, and one of the best of American, romances; it is the peculiar mingling of speculation and experience which lends *Moby Dick* (1851) its special power.

The time was propitious for such a book. The golden age of the whalers was drawing to a close, though no decline had yet set in, and the native imagination had

been stirred by tales of deeds done on remote oceans by the most adventurous Yankees of the age, in the arduous calling in which New England, and especially the hard little island of Nantucket, led and taught the world. "The Nantucketer," says Melville, "he alone resides and riots on the sea. . . . *There* is his home; *there* lies his business, which a Noah's flood would not interrupt though it overwhelmed all the millions in China. He lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie; he hides among the waves, he climbs them as chamois hunters climb the Alps. For years he knows not the land; so that when he comes to it at last, it smells like another world, more strangely than the moon would to an Englishman. With the landless gull, that at sunset folds her wings and is rocked to sleep between billows; so at nightfall, the Nantucketer, out of sight of land, furls his sails, and lays him to his rest, while under his very pillow rush herds of walruses and whales." A minor literature of whaling had grown up, chiefly the records of actual voyages and a few novels, like J. C. Hart's *Miriam Coffin* (1834). But the whalers still lacked any such romantic record as the backwoodsmen had. Melville brought to the task an exact knowledge of the craft, a large and curious learning in all that pertained to whales ancient and modern, and an imagination which worked with lurid power upon the facts of his own experience, swinging resistlessly over the seven seas and the seventy regions of the earth. Moby Dick, the strange, fierce white whale with his wrinkled forehead and high pyramidical hump, the villain that Captain Ahab pursues with such relentless fury, was already a legend among the whalers, who knew him as Mocha Dick. And

Melville was too much a transcendentalist — too richly a romancer — not to invest the chase with some kind of moral or poetic significance. As he handles the story, Ahab, who has lost a leg in the jaws of the whale, is driven by a wild passion of revenge which has maddened him. "All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick." Infected himself, Ahab infects his crew with his frenzy, and leaving behind them the vivid actualities of Nantucket they move into a Pacific which seems less a fact than a truth, less a truth than an eternal symbol of the universe. "There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness. To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian Ocean and Atlantic being but its arms. The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yester-

day planted by the recentest race of men, and lave the faded but still gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham; while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying, endless, unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans. Thus this mysterious divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth." In such a setting no wonder that the chase after Moby Dick comes to have the semblance of a conflict between the eternal, unscathable forces of nature and the ineluctable enmity of man; and the eventual catastrophe, which leaves ship and sailors strangling in the water while the great beast shoulders his white way off on other business, seems the crash of a tumbling order. These are the theme and climax, barely reported, but description cannot report the extraordinary mixture in *Moby Dick* of vivid adventures, minute details, cloudy symbolisms, thrilling pictures of the sea in every mood, sly mirth and cosmic ironies, real and incredible characters, wit, speculation, humor, color. The style is mannered but felicitous, warm, insinuating, pictorial, allusive, and witty; though the book is long, crowded with the lore of the deep, yet the delays of the narrative but arouse more and more faculties of suspense until the end comes, swift and final. Too irregular, too bizarre, perhaps, ever to win the most popular suffrage, the immense originality of *Moby Dick* must warrant the claim of its admirers that it belongs with the greatest sea romances in the whole literature of the world.

This stupendous yarn, which Melville told Hawthorne had been cooked in hell-fire, seems to have exhausted its

author. *Pierre* (1852) is hopelessly frantic, the work of a mad Meredith raving over moral ambiguities; *Israel Potter* (1855), a Revolutionary story, is not markedly original; neither are *The Piazza Tales* (1856) and *The Confidence Man* (1857). The verses which Melville wrote in his later years, his sole output, are in a few instances happy and resonant, but more often jagged and harsh. Whatever the cause of his loss of power, he fretted under it and grew more and more metaphysical, tortured, according to Hawthorne, by uncertainty as to a future life, and by his own words shown to have despaired of any future for his writings. The way of metaphysics, for Melville, was madness; his earlier works might have taught him that he was lost without a solid basis of fact; in himself he lacked discipline and form. He moved restlessly about, living now in New York, now in a farmhouse near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, now in New York again, marrying in 1847, lecturing on the South Seas during the years 1857–60 in many cities of the United States and Canada, and visiting Europe and Palestine, about which he wrote a poem — *Clarel* (1876) — two volumes long and a rival of *Mardi* in eccentricity. Finally, he was appointed to a place in the New York Custom House in 1866 and served there for twenty years, living a private life of almost entire, though voluntary and studious, seclusion, musing on the philosophies. "How many," he had said in *Moby Dick* of Tashtego's fall into the whale's head, "have likewise fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there?" Melville's death in 1891 removed from American literature one of its most promising and yet most disap-

pointing figures. Of late years, however, his fame shows a tendency to revive, perhaps more considerably in England than in America. Barrie's Captain Hook is confessedly derived from Melville; John Masefield has said that *Moby Dick* speaks the whole secret of the sea; Lady Sybil Scott admitted passages from Melville to *The Book of the Sea*, which, though verse for the most part, she could not think complete without Defoe, Melville, and Joseph Conrad. And while Melville at home has had somewhat slighter praise, an acquaintance with his work is a sign by which it may be learned whether any given American knows the literature of his country.

CHAPTER IV

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Thus far the cause of the American novel had enlisted no man who came primarily for the sake of art. Brown had been a radical journalist, Cooper a stentorian man of action, Simms a passionate antiquarian, Melville a transcendentalist with adventures to recount; but all of them had been improvisatores, although Melville, it is true, took some heed of his technical manœuvers. The art of fiction was being studied in the United States during this half century only in connection with the short story, which Irving had invested with his amused and amusing charm, of which Poe had discovered secrets of structure and effect not heretofore analyzed, and into which Hawthorne as the century advanced was pouring a deeper and deeper strain of intellectual and moral significance. Neither Irving nor Poe undertook a novel in any strict sense of the word, nearly as Irving's versions of history in works like *The Conquest of Granada* or *Astoria* approach the manner and color of contemporary romance; or as bulky as was Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, of Nantucket* (1838), which pretended to be a veracious book of travels though it was not. Nor do such pleasant divagations as Longfellow's *Hyperion* (1839) and *Kavanagh* (1849) or Whittier's *Margaret Smith's Journal* (1849), though not

without invention, take any conspicuous position in the history of the American novel. When Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850 he could not profit by a long series of native experiments in the art of the novel but had to initiate the mode in which he has since seemed supreme.

And yet *The Scarlet Letter* represents in Hawthorne's own career the fruit of an apprenticeship to art the like of which no other American man of letters has demanded of himself. For twenty-five years a disposition which Hawthorne generally encouraged had held him to a task of preparation. Born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804, he came of a line of substantial citizens settled in the town since its earliest days. Once prominent, the line had become less so, but all its generations had busied themselves with affairs, latterly on the sea. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who could not point to even a clergyman among his ancestors, was the first of his name to be sedentary. As a boy he was robust, handsome, athletic, no particular student, but rather more of a reader of general literature than has been ordinarily noted, ranging easily from *The Faerie Queene* to *The Newgate Calendar*. When he was fourteen, Hawthorne proceeded to less literary adventures, and spent a year in the deep seclusion of the Maine woods along Lake Sebago. "It was there," he later declared, "I got my cursed habits of solitude." At the time he took a keen and wild delight in his exposure to the forest, which eventually played a larger part in his imaginative life than the sea which his fathers had followed and to which he himself at first wanted to go. He spent four years at Bowdoin College, which was then scarcely more

than a clearing on the edge of the frontier, although it was also an average country college for the day and included among its students, besides Hawthorne and his particular friend Horatio Bridge, a future president and a future poet — Franklin Pierce and Longfellow. After graduation in 1825 Hawthorne returned to Salem not yet finally decided upon a profession but evidently with a stronger drift, perhaps even a stronger determination, toward authorship than he was accustomed to admit.

The records of his life between this and the appearance of *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) are dusky and brief. His mother, since her widowhood in 1808, had lived in a rigid seclusion which naturally influenced the entire family, confirming in her son an original tendency. "I had very few acquaintances in Salem," he afterward said, "and during the nine or ten years that I spent there, in this solitary way, I doubt whether so much as twenty people in the town were aware of my existence." He rarely left the house except by twilight, but endlessly read and reflected, instructing himself in the dim Puritan past and absorbing into his imagination the residuum of its spirit, even while he grew increasingly critical of its doctrines. The gesture of sentimental asceticism with which the hero of his first book, the smooth but undistinguished *Fanshawe* (1828), in the conclusion waves aside a proposal of marriage from the heroine only himself to die interestingly of consumption within two paragraphs, could have come naturally from Hawthorne's pen during but an inconsiderable period, for though solitary he was not morbid, and he developed in the grave sunniness of his temper as clearly as in any other quality he possessed. Viewing the matter

subsequently, when love and ambition had plucked him from his first solitude, he did not disapprove of it; "if I had sooner made my escape into the world, I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude. . . . But living in solitude till the fulness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth with the freshness of my heart." From a less sincere man this would sound priggish enough. Hawthorne held aloof not because he thought himself too precious or merely because he knew himself too shy for general society, but in part also because of an opinion which governed his early behavior as an artist. "I used to think I could imagine all passions, all feelings, and states of the heart and mind." So competent was his imagination to interest and sustain him, so pervasive if not powerful, in its silent way so full of vitality, that he did not starve during his twelve lonely years but gradually ripened into a spirit that was no less strong than tender, no less sane than original, no less massive and secure than delicate and sympathetic.

Nor must his imagination be thought of as feeding solely upon itself. At least once a year it was his habit to rouse himself for a season and make excursions here and there through his native section, an alert and observant traveler. The journal which he regularly kept and various of his tales and sketches bear witness to these journeys. The White Mountains are the scene of *The Great Carbuncle* and *The Ambitious Guest;* somewhere north of Boston Hawthorne laid the meeting genially recorded in *The Seven Vagabonds;* at Martha's Vineyard he met the

village sculptor of *Chippings with a Chisel;* upon a visit to the Shaker community at Canterbury, New Hampshire, he based *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and *The Shaker Bridal,* though the action of the latter story takes place elsewhere; the shaggy flanks of Greylock in the Berkshires furnish the wild setting for the wilder story of *Ethan Brand;* and in other sketches and journal entries Hawthorne writes of other regions in Vermont and Connecticut and New York to which he wandered, once as far as to Niagara and possibly still farther to Detroit. In none of these does there appear that elaboration of local color which was to characterize American short stories a generation or so later, but neither was Hawthorne inattentive to the outward manners of his age. He is a prime source for modern knowledge of them. Somewhat unexpectedly, he had a decided taste for the low life which he encountered, for peddlers, drovers, tawdry hawkers of amusement, stage-agents, and tavern-haunters. A Fielding would have known them better, but Hawthorne knew them.

At the same time he invaded the past of New England, hunting for pictures with which to enlarge his consciousness of life. From the very first, as in his sketches of Sir William Phips and Mrs. Hutchinson, he neglected analysis or historical narrative for the sake of constructing definite little scenes out of his material. "And now, having arranged these preliminaries," he says after two or three pages, "we shall attempt to picture forth a day of Sir William's life." And similarly after the briefest discussion of Mrs. Hutchinson: "We shall endeavor to give a more practical idea of this part of her course" — a

crisp little vignette of the trial. To the end of Hawthorne's apprenticeship this was his historical method, perhaps best displayed in the vivid and diversified panorama of Salem, from its founding to the present, which he set forth in *Main Street*. He was not contented, however, to represent scenes for themselves, but sought assiduously for moments of drama, little episodes of controversy, clashes between the parties and ideas which divided old New England. In *The Gentle Boy* he exhibited the tragedy of the Quaker persecutions; in *The Gray Champion* the spirit of the Settlement flashing out against the aggressions of Governor Andros; in *The Maypole of Merry Mount* the conflict between the Pilgrims and the Merry Mounters, which Hawthorne deliberately symbolized. "The future complexion of New England was involved in this important quarrel. Should the grizzly saints establish their jurisdiction over the gay sinners, then would their spirits darken all the clime, and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm forever. But should the banner staff of Merry Mount be fortunate, sunshine would break upon the hills, and flowers would beautify the forest, and late posterity do homage to the Maypole." To compare a tale like *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, a simple though significant description of the meeting of certain persons going to join a Shaker community and certain others just leaving it, with *Young Goodman Brown*, the somber account of how a witches' sabbath in the dark woods around early Salem tempted an honest man from his duty and his peace of mind, is to discover with what a poise Hawthorne stood at the center of his world and sent his imagination out on subtle errands

equally into the past and the present, exploring everywhere, and with accurate instinct seizing upon the matters which were proper to his art.

Both these last-named stories are concerned with a theme which Hawthorne touched again and again and which rose from a deep inner experience: the conflict in a soul between the pride which would contract it to harsh and narrow limits and the affections which would reach out and bind it to the natural society of its kind. It is the theme also of *Wakefield*, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, *The Artist of the Beautiful*, and *Ethan Brand*, as well as many others. Always Hawthorne stands with society and sunshine against pride and gloom. Much as he had inherited from his Puritan ancestors of the knowledge of the secret heart, which in New England, from once seeking incessantly within itself for signs of a light from God, had formed habits of dwelling too constantly there; and much as he employed the secrets he had found in his own buried researches, Hawthorne was little of a Puritan. His sympathies in the historical tales are steadily with the radical movements away from the domination of the straiter sects, and in his contemporary pieces he regularly demolishes the austerities which had come down from the Fathers. In all his tales he is nowhere more engaging than in *The Seven Vagabonds*, wherein he — or the teller of the story — falls in with a chance assembly of traveling entertainers, the minstrels and jongleurs of seldom-smiling New England, and plans to accompany them as a sort of peripatetic novelist. This is a conception of Hawthorne amazingly unlike that which sees him as a reflective owl blinking in his dingy garret, but it is not far from the conception of

himself which he more than once cherished, and which he embodied in his original scheme for *Twice-Told Tales*. This collection he wanted to call *The Story-Teller* and to present as a series of narratives in a framework describing the adventures and observations of just such a novelist errant on his varied rounds. The publisher would not agree; the tales appeared without the framework in 1837, Horatio Bridge having guaranteed the expenses; and Hawthorne came promptly into a small but gratifying reputation decisively helped by approving reviews from Longfellow and, a little later, from Poe.

That he had heretofore been, as he not quite correctly said, "the obscurest man of letters in America," elicits the less complaint over the blindness of his contemporaries since he had worn anonymity as a regular garment and had addressed the public, for the most part, from the pages of very modest magazines or annuals among the dying birds and weeping willows which made up the fauna and flora of those periodicals in that period. A touch of fame stirred him to rather greater activity; and he was stirred still more by falling in love, very soon after the publication of his book, with Sophia Amelia Peabody, whom he married in 1842 and with whom he subsequently led a life of exquisite felicity. "We are but shadows," he wrote during his engagement; "we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream,— till the heart be touched. That touch creates us,— then we begin to be, — thereby we are beings of reality and inheritors of eternity." Now he so far emerged from his solitude as to look about for some livelihood which would make marriage pos-

sible. Appointed by George Bancroft to be weigher and gauger at the Boston Custom House early in 1839, he served there two years and then entered the community at Brook Farm, not because he was a communist or a transcendentalist but because he was a lover who hoped that the experiment would help him to become a husband. A year sufficed to make it plain that his art could not flourish under such conditions. He left Brook Farm, issued a second series (1842) of *Twice-Told Tales*, was married, and went to live at the Old Manse in Concord, in the neighborhood of the two other most authentic New England authors, Emerson and Thoreau. There Hawthorne lived for three years, until he returned to Salem as surveyor of the Custom House for three years more; in Concord he wrote, beside certain hack pieces, the *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846); there he rounded out his years of preparation for the greater novels. The differences between the *Twice-Told Tales* and the *Mosses* are not important, nor are the stories of the later collection always later in composition, but it should at least be noted that whereas the *Tales* contains a larger number of vivid pictures from past or present, the range of the *Mosses* is on the whole the greater. Here may be found those profound studies of conscience, *Young Goodman Brown*, *Rappaccini's Daughter*, *The Christmas Banquet*, and *Roger Malvin's Burial;* while side by side with them are smiling and elusive exercises of Hawthorne's fancy, *The Celestial Railroad* and *Feathertop. Rappaccini's Daughter* is longer than any tale Hawthorne had written since *The Gentle Boy* a dozen years before; the average sketch or story in the *Mosses* is nearly twice as long as in the *Tales;* and here, moreover, may

be found all of those singular narratives — *A Select Party, The Hall of Fantasy, The Procession of Life, The New Adam and Eve, The Intelligence Office, Earth's Holocaust, A Virtuoso's Collection* — written between 1842 and 1844 in which Hawthorne assembles upon some fanciful scheme a gallery of personages or symbols or ideas among which he moves as showman or spectator commenting upon the varieties of life and legend. Perhaps without being aware of it he was growing ready for larger flights and a wider scene. At the same time he imparts an artful unity to the *Mosses* by the preface which conducts to the stories as an avenue of trees conducts to the Old Manse itself and which concentrates attention upon his themes as the cylinder of a telescope concentrates attention upon the object covered by the lens.

A similar function is performed for *The Scarlet Letter*, written in Salem during the winter of 1849–50, by the introductory essay on the Custom House where Hawthorne had recently, as he thought, been wasting his time. The essay understandably surprised his late associates, who, though the gravest of citizens, learned now that they had been for Hawthorne little more than the characters of a farce; and it still surprises those of his readers who, knowing his reputation better than his veritable self, find in it a humor so chuckling, an eye for personal traits so sharp, a hand so deft at whimsical caricature, an intelligence so shrewd in its grasp of concrete realities. It was not for lack of talent in that direction that Hawthorne overlooked the surfaces of life; it was for lack of interest in matters not central to the serious concerns of the soul. In being a Puritan to the extent that he rarely lifted his

gaze from the human spirit in its sincerest hours, he was also a universal poet. He who during a long experimental stage had brooded over the confused spectacle of mankind, posing for himself various of the soul's problems and translating them into lucid forms of beauty, had now posed a larger problem on a larger scale. To make a novel out of his material instead of a brief tale Hawthorne did not increase it, as he might have done, out of his antiquarian knowledge of early Salem: as regards such decorations his story is almost naked. Nor did he increase it by adding to his caste of characters: he need not have named, he need hardly have referred to, others than the four who hold the tense center of his stage. Nor yet again did he increase it by any multiplication of events, by any loud or active phantasmagoria: few events and half a dozen acts suffice him. With an austere economy that must have seemed parsimony had Hawthorne's vision and his style been less rich, he discarded all but the essential cruxes of his argument. His tableaux succeed one another almost without the links of narrative which ordinarily distinguish the novel from the play; yet as the curtain dimly rises upon each new tableau there is the sense of something transacted since the last — a sense conveyed by subtle hints so numerous as to betray how much more Hawthorne knew about his characters than he had space to put into words. With the same parsimony he narrows the physical bounds of his action to a little strip of seacoast between the gray Atlantic which signifies all the memories of Salem and the grayer forest which spells its obstinate expectations. Only supreme skill could have exhibited within these limits the seven years of action

which have to seem at once long enough to constitute a cycle of penance and also brief enough to present a drama of which all the parts knit solidly together under the spectator's eye. Something more than mere technical devices, however, rounds out and compacts the story — something more than the scrupulous disposition of tableaux and the recurrence of that overshadowing symbol which is sewed upon Hester's bosom and burned upon Dimmesdale's; which is significantly and exquisitely woven into Pearl's very nature, and which, rather too artificially, is blazoned upon the sky. Hawthorne gives every evidence of having moved through his first and greatest long romance with an unfaltering stride, never obliged to consider how he should construct because the story grew almost of itself, and never at a loss for substance because his mind was perfectly stored — neither too much nor too little — with the finest materials of observation and reflection gathered during a lifetime. For three years he had written almost nothing; now all the power that he had unconsciously hoarded freed itself and flowed into his book; now all the quarter-century of discipline in form and texture effortlessly shaped an abundant flood.

The historian should not hint at too much that is merely mystical in the making of *The Scarlet Letter;* it is an achievement of deliberate art grown competent and unconscious by careful exercise. At the same time, the impact which the story makes may be traced back of Hawthorne's own art and personality to the Puritan tradition which, much as he might disagree with it on occasion, he had none the less inherited. An ancestral strain accounts for this conception of adultery as an affair not of the

civil order but of the immortal soul. The same strain in his constitution, moreover, led him to make of these circumstances more than the familiar triangle. A Frenchman might have painted the joy of Dimmesdale, the lover, with his forbidden mistress; an Italian might have traced the fierce course of Chillingworth, the husband, to a justified revenge; a German might have exhibited Hester, the offending wife, as actually achieving an outer freedom to match that one within. Hawthorne transfers the action to an entirely different plane. Let the persons in the triple conflict be involved as they may with one another, each of them stands essentially apart from the remaining two, because each is occupied with a still vaster conflict, with good and evil as the rival elements which continually tug at the poor human creature. Small wonder, then, that the flesh, to which the sin was superficially due, should go unsung; that the bliss of the senses should hardly once be attended to. After such fleeting pleasures comes the inexorable judgment, which is of the spirit not of the body. To the Puritan imagination, journeys begin not end in lovers meeting. The tragedy of Dimmesdale lies in his defeat by evil through the temptation of cowardice and hypocrisy, which are sins. Chillingworth tragically, and sinfully, chooses evil when he decides to take a treacherous vengeance into his own hands, though vengeance, he knows, is another's. Hester alone emerges from her guilt through her public expiation and the long practice of virtue afterward.

So far *The Scarlet Letter* agrees with the doctrines of the Puritans. Its broader implications critically transcend them. In what dark slumber during these seven

years has that Jehovah wrapped himself whom the elder Puritans invoked day and night about all their business, praying for the remission of sins through the merciful affection of his son? What prayers go up? Who counts upon the treasury of grace from which any sinner might hope to obtain salvation if his repentance were only sore enough? The theology which for seventeenth-century men was almost as real as religion itself had come to be for their profound descendant no more authoritative than some remote mythology except as it shadowed forth a cosmic and moral order which Hawthorne had himself observed. In one respect he seems sterner than the elder Puritans, for he admits into his narrative no hope of any providential intervention which might set these jangled bells again into accord. Dimmesdale will not encourage Hester to hope for a compensating future life even. The consequences of deeds live forever. At the same time Hawthorne has drawn the action down from heaven's pavement, where Milton would have conducted it, to earth and has humanized it to the extent that he centers it in human bosoms. The newest schools of psychology cannot object to a reading of sin which shows Dimmesdale and Chillingworth as the victims of instincts and antipathies which fester because unnaturally repressed while Hester Prynne is cleansed through the discovery of her offense and grows healthier by her confession. All the Christian centuries have known the truth here represented. But only certain of those centuries — and not the Puritan seventeenth — have been capable of viewing love as Hawthorne views it and unfolds its tragedy. To the actual contemporaries of Hester and Dimmesdale it would have

seemed a blasphemy worse than adultery for the lovers to agree, in their meeting at the brookside, that "what we did had a consecration of its own." These are Hester's words, and so it was to Hester that eventually "it seemed a fouler offence committed by Roger Chillingworth, than any which had since been done him, that, in the time when her heart knew no better, he had persuaded her to fancy herself happy by his side." Hester thus becomes the type — subtly individualized but yet a type — of the moving principle of life which different societies in different ways may constrain but which in itself irresistibly endures. Her story is an allegory of the passion through which the race continues. She feels the ignominy which attends her own irregular behavior and accepts her fate as the reward of evil, but she does not understand it so far as to wish uncommitted the act which her society calls a sin. A harder woman might have become an active rebel; a softer woman might have sunk passively down into unavailing penitence. Hester stands erect, and thinks. She asks herself whether women, as life was constituted, could be really happy, even the happiest woman. "As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled." Yet her mind, though dismissing her particular case as a malady without a cure, still ranges the universe for some cure for the injustice her sex inherits. "The world's law was no law for her mind." In this manner those whom the world crushes always take their surest revenge. Hester finds no speculative answer; and so she turns to action, plays her necessary part, and gives herself to the nurture of her child, no less a mother than if approved by every human

ordinance. A universal allegory of motherhood, her story is also a criticism of the Puritan attempt to bind life too tightly. In the midst of the drab circumstances of Salem this woman of such radiance of beauty and magnificence of life rises up and cracks the stiff frame of the time. Great as her own suffering is, she has in some measure contributed to let a little light into the general tragedy of her sex. *The Scarlet Letter* is not merely a Puritan story. A spirit larger than Puritanism, as large as the world's experience, informs and ripens the book.

Against a background so somber all the more do the fantastic elements stand out. They are summed up in the crimson brand which Hester wears as the statutory label of her offense but which out of some trait of whimsy she embroiders and illuminates until it is a token of the "rich, voluptuous, Oriental" luxuriance of her nature. The idea of such a label and its consequences for the wearer had long haunted Hawthorne, at least since he introduced it in 1837 into his story of *Endicott and the Red Cross.* It haunted him, indeed, so impressively at last as now and then almost to detach itself from the matter symbolized and to assume an entity of its own — tending inevitably on such occasions to be a mere frozen fancy. What saved Hawthorne here was his felicitous conception of Pearl, the child of such wayward passion and defiant tenderness, as a reality sprung from a symbol, as the scarlet letter incarnate. Of this little creature, all brilliance and beauty yet all caprice and unaccountability, Hester "felt like one who has evoked a spirit, but, by some irregularity in the process of conjuration, has failed to win the master-word that should control this new and

incomprehensible intelligence." Pearl lends this story its note of exquisiteness: she is the light that flashes across the gloom, the color that warms the sober tapestry, the wings that wake the scene when intensity has arrested movement. Nothing better than the figure of Pearl illustrates the intimate connection between Hawthorne's most delicate fancy and the closely scrutinized actuality upon which he founded his art. When he shaped her he must have been thinking constantly of his little daughter Una, who during the composition of the book, while his mother lay dying in his house, frolicked before his eyes like a bright fairy at the doors of a tomb. It was of Pearl that he says: "Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl were a human child. She seemed rather an airy sprite, which, after playing its fantastic sports for awhile upon the cottage floor, would flit away with a mocking smile." It was of Una at nearly the same time that Hawthorne wrote in his diary, among many other comments which suggest the qualities of Pearl: "there is something that almost frightens me about the child,— I know not whether elfish or angelic, but, at all events, supernatural. She steps so boldly into the midst of everything, shrinks from nothing, has such a comprehension of everything, seems at times to have but little delicacy, and anon shows that she possesses the finest essence of it,— now so hard, now so tender; now so perfectly unreasonable, soon again so wise. In short, I now and then catch an aspect of her in which I cannot believe her to be my own human child, but a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil, haunting the house where I dwell."

It is a revealing fact about the American taste for fiction in 1850 that though Hawthorne's publisher regarded *The Scarlet Letter* as a masterpiece he issued the book in an edition of only five thousand copies, which were, however, so soon sold as immediately to call for another. The fame of Hawthorne was henceforth assured, and it helped stir him during the next three years to an activity he had never known before. Leaving Salem in the summer of 1850 for the lovely Berkshire village of Lenox, he proceeded early in the fall to a new novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*, completed and published early in the following year. In 1851 he wrote *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1852) and collected various scattered pieces into *The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-Told Tales* (1852); that winter, now removed to West Newton, Massachusetts, he produced *The Blithedale Romance* (1852); the next summer, finally established at The Wayside, a house he had bought in Concord, he wrote his *Life of Franklin Pierce* (1852); and in the winter of 1852–53, his *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), completed just before he left for England, where upon Pierce's appointment he was to be United States consul at Liverpool. The life of Pierce was a trivial biography of a trivial man who was Hawthorne's close and loyal friend. The *Wonder-Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*, with their exquisite versions of Greek myths quaintly medievalized and gently Puritanized by a passage through Hawthorne's imagination, in becoming unchallenged classics for all children have perpetuated the grace of his attitude toward his own and continue to exhale the light and sweetness which Hawthorne seems to have distilled into them in the sunny

intervals between his profounder studies of these same years. The *Snow-Image* volume, besides earlier writings some of great merit and some of little, boasts in the title story, *The Great Stone Face*, and *Ethan Brand*, three late tales that are among his best. The most considerable achievement of the period, however, is of course the two novels, *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*.

Writing in the preface to the first of these Hawthorne distinguished between the Romance and the Novel. "The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former — while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart — has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture." Hawthorne, who called *The House of the Seven Gables* a Romance, assumed the full license to which he thought himself entitled, but it is with respect to the "atmospherical medium" that his powers were most successfully employed. If *The Scarlet Letter* springs from the faculty which had earlier created *Young Goodman Brown* and *Rappaccini's Daughter* and *Ethan Brand*, *The House of the Seven Gables* springs from the descriptive faculty which had set down *The Seven Vagabonds* and *The Toll-Gatherer's Day* and *Main Street*. By some inexplicable

alchemy practised upon the principles of color it multiplies and combines shades of gray until they become — if it is not too fanciful to say so — silver and rose, faded green and dull crimson. The House itself, though the brisk daily life of Salem swirls naturally about it, contrives to stand invested in a cloud of omen projected from the dusky interior which has been innocent of sunshine, physical or moral, for two centuries. Ghosts crowd it, the ghosts of extinct grandeurs which have left dim tokens in portraits and furnishings too valuable for the present fortunes of the Pyncheon stock, and yet fiercely cherished by old Hepzibah, whose pride is a token hardly less dim. All the elements of the story center around these dusky chambers: the ancestral curse upon the founder, the treasure hidden in some forgotten cranny, the faded old brother and sister who when they try to escape are drawn irresistibly back, even the "antique and hereditary" flowers in the garden and the almost exanimate poultry whose "queer, rusty, withered aspect" parallels somewhat oversignificantly the appearance of their human owners. The groundwork of this narrative is more richly woven than that of *The Scarlet Letter*, more full of details which Hawthorne had personally observed, but in picture and atmosphere it is no less finely unified.

The characters and action suffer a little from the perfection of the background. At certain moments they fade into it and grow indistinct, like men speaking out of dark corners in muted voices. When Hepzibah ventures so far from the recesses of the Pyncheon pride as to begin keeping her poor little shop, the light strikes her and she becomes pathetically real, and again when she puts forth

her timid efforts to cheer her brother; but most of the time she is half hidden against the background. So with Clifford, who actually first appears in a darkened room which he has not been seen to enter and who continues to inhabit shadows. It is because of the particularly withered look of these older Pyncheons and of the house which becomes them that Phœbe shines, rather than because of any superlative vitality in herself. Externally the most natural of Hawthorne's women, she proves upon analysis to be scarcely more than a winsome type of young girl deliberately introduced for the sake of contrast. The same purpose accounts for the daguerreotypist Holgrave, who in a rented gable of the old mansion nurses opinions which challenge the authority of the past here lying so heavily upon the present. What Phœbe personifies Holgrave argues: the need and right of living beings to throw off the burdens they inherit; but Phœbe has only the instincts of youth and Holgrave argues without activity. Their marriage at the end, while promising a renewal of energy for two decaying stocks, does not contradict the moral which Hawthorne had in mind — "the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief." Clifford by his unjust imprisonment has been broken in mind and body until even his former love of beauty has turned to a sporadic gluttony, and Hepzibah has wasted her whole life waiting in poverty for her brother's release. Nothing now can recompense them for what they have lost; in them the moral sternly and veraciously shows its head. Elsewhere, however, the tragedy wears

thinner. Judge Pyncheon, who has oppressed his kinsfolk and falls himself under the family curse, belongs too much to the stage — or to Dickens. The curse hangs vaguely over the action, a part of the house's furniture, an element thickening the shadow, but still a thing with little life apart from that preserved by the Pyncheon belief — and pride — in it. As in *The Scarlet Letter* the implications frequently go beyond the doctrine, so in *The House of the Seven Gables* the picture, with its richness of texture and depth of atmosphere, frequently overpowers the argument. The picture is the memorable aspect of the book.

Of *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne declared that he had " occasionally availed himself of his actual reminiscences " of Brook Farm —" essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact "—" merely to establish a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives." The personages of his romance he said were all imaginary. Conjecture has persisted in identifying Zenobia with Margaret Fuller and Miles Coverdale with Hawthorne himself; and research, since the publication of various portions of Hawthorne's diary, has found numerous " sources " for *Blithedale*, such as the masquerade in the woods, which actually occurred at Brook Farm, the little seamstress there from Boston, whose appearance must have suggested Priscilla's, and the woman drowned at Concord in 1843, whose fate is known to have suggested that of Zenobia. These, and many other items of actuality which might be added, are all

subordinated to the central invention, enough so that in spite of them the romance has often been called the most shadowy Hawthorne ever wrote. A fellow-craftsman, however, William Dean Howells, preferred *The Blithedale Romance* to the others, and Henry James thought it " the lightest, the brightest, the liveliest " of them all. It lacks, indeed, any such mastering theme as that in *The Scarlet Letter*, or any such brocaded vestures as is worn by *The House of the Seven Gables.* Its particular excellence must be looked for in a touching charm that springs from the very tenuousness of its substance — a tenuousness greater than life's even when Hawthorne was writing about matters he had seen with his physical eye, because the entire action of the novel is represented through the medium of its narrator, Coverdale the minor poet, who daintily eyes the moving world without ever coming close to it. Because Coverdale has no means of knowing all the history of the principal characters, Hawthorne waives the right of omniscience and omits certain hidden motives and submerged links of the story. Coverdale, too, being in love with Priscilla, tends to the confusion and limitation of vision appertaining to his state. While Hawthorne doubtless did not calculate all the consequences of his device, he was enough of a dramatist to incur them. The story flickers, lightens up, broadens, deepens, contracts, almost disappears, flares forth again, as it would have done in the perceptions of a real Coverdale; and the whole is seen through a misty illusion comparable in effect to those curtains of gauze let down at theaters to soften a scene. Through that wavering veil Coverdale sees enacted, against scenery which truthfully represents a com-

munity like Brook Farm, the tragedy of Hollingsworth the philanthropist and the two women who interrupt his career to love him. Through the figure of Hollingsworth project some of the bones of Hawthorne's reasoning; the man who blindly sacrifices actual hearts for an abstract cause is himself here something of an abstraction, though he eventually recognizes his fault with a human sincerity. Priscilla, outwardly so visible because so closely studied from the little seamstress at Brook Farm, is never quite impressive; she has been refined to a point which brings her too near the bloodless decorum of her decade. It is in Zenobia that the rather wintry senses of Coverdale — and readers of all degrees of vitality after him — detect the fullest flood of life, fire and color, passion and experience. Hester Prynne had been of this stature. Both of them come into Hawthorne's New England from other regions; both to be gorgeous have to be exotic. This may perhaps be taken as his tacit accusation that magnificence of personality did not ripen on the rock-bound coast. At least his imagination had gone out and found abundance and ripeness where they dwelt.

The seven years which Hawthorne spent in Europe removed him for the first time from the village atmosphere which — except in his imagination — was all he had known heretofore. His journals in England, France, and Italy throw quite as much light backward upon his earlier days as upon those of which he sedulously records the very modest happenings. A man of genius, already a classic, nearly fifty years old when he left America, he had yet to make his acquaintance with architecture, music,

painting, and sculpture on their native ground, had yet to study the remains of great antiquity or to encounter a brilliant society. Any such society he conspicuously missed; he met few men of letters of real distinction; and he never felt more at home than among the other American and British expatriates in Florence. With the eagerness of a very young American he tasted the delights of antiquity in the routine quarters. With the patience of a man long withheld from masterpieces he gorged cathedrals and galleries. Very often he was bored. At the end of his journey he could still seriously condemn the representation of the nude in art. But his consistent provincialism is saved from being disagreeable by his exquisite honesty. What far smaller men learn early Hawthorne was learning late, but he gave himself without stealth or affectation to the task of mastering a new world, as observant, sensitive, and masculine in spirit as he had been in familiar New England. How good his temper was in the new circumstances appears from *Our Old Home* (1863), an account of his English stay subsequently refined from his English note-books: a book both beautiful and shrewd and nicely touched with international satire. A still more eminent, though hardly a more characteristic, product of his European experience was the romance which he himself always thought his best, *The Marble Faun*, begun at Rome in 1859 and finished the next year in England.

The venerable commonplace regarding *The Marble Faun* says that it is a guidebook to Rome — the Rome, of course, of the tourist who studies the city as a glorious mausoleum without much attention to the living inhabi-

tants unless they appear in carnival or procession. Learning and observation, indeed, went into the rich, smooth, trustworthy, and often penetrating descriptions which adorn the tale, but the atmosphere, when all is said, lacks the golden depth and substantial intimacy which Hawthorne had caught for *The House of the Seven Gables*. Though the Rome he saw was older than his Salem by millenniums to centuries, he had lived more years in Salem than months in Rome. The sole new quality he could impart to his Italian romance was the sense of crowds of people filling the scene, constantly stirring in variegated abundance, and providing a new privacy in the midst of which his important characters might take refuge. From these crowds the atmosphere derives more density than from the works of art and the landscapes, comments upon which just miss overloading the narrative. It is perhaps the best proof of Hawthorne's capaciousness of mind that he could have admitted so much still life into his action without confusing it. Elaborate as the background is, and stiff and difficult as it must have been to handle, the few essential persons of the drama move as freely and naturally as in the earlier novels with their almost empty stages.

The idea of the romance occurred to Hawthorne when he first saw the Faun of Praxiteles in the gallery at the Capitol and thought "that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of [the faun's] species having become intermingled with the human race; a family with the faun blood in them having prolonged itself from the classic era till our own days." Originally struck, it seems, by the fanciful possibilities of

his theme, Hawthorne afterward deepened it into another Paradise Lost — of a sort. Donatello, descendant of a faun and in spite of centuries of intermixture almost a faun himself, through sin estranges himself from his careless Eden and enters the human fraternity of guilt in the companionship of the more experienced Miriam, on whose behalf he sins, and who, by not preventing him, sins with him. Having thus shared a sin they find themselves indissolubly married by its spiritual consequences, whatever their outer fortunes may be. An accidental witness of the murder, Hilda, whose conscience grew in New England, in another degree also acquires the responsibility, which tortures her until she rises above her Puritan prejudices to a universal mood and unburdens herself at the confessional which her own creed has disallowed. The fourth character, Kenyon, has only technical duties to perform: to be a chorus in some scenes and a not-too-impassioned witness in others, and to marry Hilda at the end. *The Marble Faun*, though twice as long as *The Scarlet Letter*, has an equal unity — if not an equal depth — of tone and a still higher concentration of events. Donatello from his ancestral tower among the Apennines and Miriam and Hilda and Kenyon from their several birthplaces, their previous lives only hinted at, come together in the easy society of Rome, where the tragedy overtakes them. They act it with the swiftness of drama and then vanish, going as mysteriously as they came, so mysteriously, indeed, as to vex all but those readers who are competent to perceive how much the strength of the central impression depends upon the obscurity which hides the past and future of the characters.

Though set in an environment so amply pagan and Catholic, *The Marble Faun* is in some respects the most Puritan of all Hawthorne's romances. He who under the gray skies of New England had created Hester and Zenobia, when he came to a world in which they and their kind might have grown to their intended stature, seems to have turned partially back to an austerer code. Among the children of the Renaissance he missed that sense of sin which in his native province had been as regularly present as sea and hills. Genial as were the pagan survivals in this many-stranded city, cheerful as were the Roman Christians, light-hearted as were the artists, Hawthorne's imagination would not expand unreservedly. It asked itself what would happen if sin and conscience should invade these charming precincts. Once more pagan than the Puritans, he was now more Puritan than the pagans. He would not let even Donatello play forever, believing that as generous youth died out of the faun he would "become sensual, addicted to gross pleasures, heavy, unsympathizing, and insulated within the narrow limits of a surly selfishness." There is more than Puritanism in such a prophecy. There is more than Puritanism in the speculation of Kenyon, which shocks Hilda but which touches the theme very sharply: "Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him. Is sin, then, . . . like sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained?" This is almost as much as to wonder whether experience itself, evil as well as good, does not civilize us, as it civilized Donatello. Hawthorne's language is the language of sin and conscience

which he had inherited, but here as in all his romances lurk certain questions the answers to which conduct to the most spacious regions of morals and imagination.

From his return in 1860 to his death four years later Hawthorne accomplished no remarkable work except *Our Old Home.* Another theme for a romance constantly tempted him, or rather, two: the idea of an elixir of life and that of the return to England of an American heir to some hereditary estate; but though he experimented with them in four fragments, *The Ancestral Footstep*, *Septimius Felton*, *Dr. Grimshawe's Secret*, and *The Dolliver Romance*, Hawthorne could not fuse or complete them. Not only had the Civil War fatally interrupted his reflections but his imagination was dissolving, his vitality breaking up, along with the New England era of which he had been, among its poets and romancers, the consummate flower. Had he survived he must have seemed an outlived figure in a community which after the war turned its eyes increasingly to Europe and to the American West, through emigration losing its compact strength, and as a result of larger connections with the rest of the world losing its stout old self-sufficiency. Although *The House of the Seven Gables* points forward to a whole school of prose elegists recording the New England decline, Hawthorne himself wrote while his corner of the country was still thriving and busy. Among men confident of the future of New England he could survey its past without the sense that life about him had diminished and so could utilize it without clutching it too closely as a compensation for the present. But though New England was still strong, it had softened its former iron theology to a more endurable

set of beliefs and under the sweet uses of prosperity had considerably enriched its life with secular culture. And yet so recent were the fires of that passion which had refined the spirit of the elder Puritans that the spirit of their descendants was still fine, though in a new way. In all but the sturdiest this modern spirit tended to be thin, frail, flat, merely a gentility of the intellect and disposition. Hawthorne was of the sturdiest. To a full heritage of the traditional inwardness he added wide reading and wide speculation and not a little observation of the color and costume of his province; he had talked with vagabonds and lived with transcendentalists. Of the little group at Concord — Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson — which with the passage of time stands up so eminently above the Longfellows and Lowells and Holmeses of the Cambridge-Boston tradition, Emerson enunciated a larger diversity of maxims, and Thoreau most vividly lived the Yankee life; but Hawthorne alone shaped the stuff of his meditations into visible forms and living creatures.

Thus he may be said to sum up and body forth the inner vision of his age and section so far as that was done by any imaginative writer. What he insufficiently reflects is the homelier, coarser qualities of New England: its tough rustic fibre, its hickory-hearted endurance, its canniness yoked with dreams, its dry, knowing humor, its crackling dialect, its home-bred complacency, the fearful silence and obstinacy of which it is capable when crossed too long, the potentialities within it of degenerating when the stronger impulses weaken. Such of these as were surface matters Hawthorne eschewed as merely so much dialect — things not essential to the heart of his investiga-

tions. He took them for granted, without comment, and went deeper. In a world, he asked himself, where human instincts are continually at war with human laws, and where laws, once broken, pursue the offender even more fiercely than they hedged him before, how are any but the more docile spirits to hold their course without calamity? The Puritan Fathers at the same inquiry, which they asked hardly more frequently than Hawthorne, could point in answer to election and atonement and divine grace. Hawthorne had inherited the old questions but not the old answers. He did not free himself from the Puritan mode of believing that to break a law is to commit a sin, or that to commit a sin is to play havoc with the soul; but he changed the terms and considered the sin as a violation less of some supernatural law than of the natural integrity of the soul. Whereas another romancer by tracking the course of the instincts which lead to what is called sin might have sought to justify them as native to the offender and so inescapable, Hawthorne accepts sin without a question and studies the consequences: in the souls of Hester and Dimmesdale, who sinned through love; of Chillingworth, who sinned through malice; of Judge Pyncheon, who sinned through covetousness; of Hollingsworth, who sinned through pride; of Donatello, who sinned, one may say, through chivalry; of Miriam, who sinned through the passion to escape her past; and of Pearl and Hepzibah and Clifford and Zenobia and Hilda, who are only the victims of sin in others. Although Hawthorne of course touches other themes than the consequence of sin, he touched it most importantly. He brought to his representation of the theme sanity without cynicism and tender-

ness without softness; he brought also, what is rarer than depth of moralism, an art finely rounded, a rich, graceful style, a spirit sweet and wholesome. He found a substance apparently as unpromising as the original soil upon which the Pilgrims established their commonwealth, and no less than they with their stony province he tamed and civilized it — going beyond them, moreover, by lifting it into enduring loveliness.

CHAPTER V

BLOOD AND TEARS

Although Hawthorne's example subsequently exercised, notably upon Howells and Henry James but also upon various slighter figures, a spell which no one of them could either justify by wielding it or escape without a struggle, during his lifetime his serious and noble art was unimportantly heeded by his fellow-craftsmen. Nor did he seem to the wide public which had come to read novels anything like so eminent in the years between *The Scarlet Letter* and the outbreak of the Civil War as he seems when looked at from the twentieth century. Heavier and louder weapons than his were needed to break down the habits which for thirty years had led American novelists to write and American readers to expect tales of adventure and external events. It was a new school of sentimentalists who, beginning about 1850, advanced with a tearful rush, brandishing those weapons in soft but effective hands.

The romance of the immediate school of Cooper did not die without a struggle, though it had indeed fallen into disuse among most writers of capacity at the time of his death and was rapidly descending into the hands of fertile hacks who for fifty years were to hold an immense audience without deserving more than the barest history. In that very year (1851) Robert Bonner bought the New

York *Ledger* and began to make it the congenial home and the hospitable patron of a sensationalism which had been growing upon native romance as its earlier energy had gradually departed from it. Hitherto most nearly anticipated by such a son of blood-and-thunder as Joseph Holt Ingraham, author of *Lafitte; or The Pirate of the Gulf* (1836), or by the swashbuckling Ned Buntline, duelist, sportsman, and perfervid patriot, this sensationalism reached unsurpassable dimensions with the prolific Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., who besides *The Gunmaker of Moscow* (1856) counted his successes in this department of literature by scores. From the *Ledger* no step in advance had to be taken by the inventors of the "dime novel," which was started upon its long career by the publishing firm of Beadle and Adams of New York in 1860. Edward S. Ellis's *Seth Jones or the Captive of the Frontier* (1860), one of the earliest of the sort, its hero formerly a scout under Ethan Allen but now adventuring in western New York, is said to have sold over 600,000 copies in half a dozen languages. The type prospered, depending almost exclusively upon native authors and native material: first the old frontier of Cooper and then the trans-Mississippi region, with its Mexicans, its bandits, its troopers, and its Indians, who have now for the most part lost the high courtesy of Cooper's and are displayed in the bitter spirit which prompted that Western saying that the only good Indian is a dead Indian. Among the actual heroes of this adventurous world the men who achieved a primacy like that of Daniel Boone among the older order of scouts were Kit Carson, the famous scout, and "Buffalo Bill" (William F. Cody), who was first

put on the stage by the intrepid Ned Buntline and later capitalized his own personality and reputation in the circus which exhibited its microcosm of the Wild West round the world. The dime novels which suggested such an enterprise, and in turn were furthered by it, were cheap, conventional, hasty — Albert W. Aiken long averaged one a week, and Prentiss Ingraham produced in all over six hundred — but they were exciting, full of incident and innocence, and scrupulously devoted to the popular doctrines of poetic justice. What they lacked was all distinction except that of a rough abundance of invention, and Frank Norris could justly grieve that the epic days of Western settlement found only such tawdry Homers. A Scott or a Cooper for those days is yet to come. In the fourth decade of the century the detective story rivaled the frontier tale, for the West was filling up and the juvenile imagination, to which the older tales had been addressed, was now turning to the towns. After 1900, both kinds, though reduced to the price of five cents a copy, gave way before the still more exciting and more easily comprehended moving picture.

It is true that one successor of Cooper upheld for a time the dignity of the old-fashioned romance. John Esten Cooke (1830–86), born in the Shenandoah Valley and brought up in Richmond, cherished a passion as intense as Simms's for his native state and deliberately set out to celebrate its past and its beauty. *Leather Stocking and Silk* (1854) and *The Last of the Foresters* (1856), both narratives of life in the Valley, recall Cooper by more than their titles; but in *The Youth of Jefferson* (1854) and its sequel, *Henry St. John, Gentleman* (1859),

Cooke seems as completely Virginian as Beverley Tucker before him, though less stately in his tread. All three of these novels have their scenes laid in Williamsburg, the old capital of the Dominion; they reproduce a society strangely made up of luxury, daintiness, elegance, penury, ugliness, brutality. At times the dialogue of Cooke's impetuous cavaliers and merry girls nearly catches the flavor of the Forest of Arden, but there is generally something stilted in their speech or behavior that spoils the gay illusion. Nevertheless, *The Virginia Comedians* (1854) may justly be called the best Virginia novel of the old régime, unless possibly *Swallow Barn* should be excepted, for reality as well as for color and spirit. No other book, of fact or fiction, so well sets forth the vision which in the days immediately before the Civil War Virginians cherished of their greater days on the eve of the Revolution — days the glories of which they thought it possible to bring back and for which if need be they were ready to fight another race of foreign tyrants. During the Civil War Cooke served as captain of cavalry, under Stuart, and had the experiences which he afterwards turned to use in a series of Confederate romances, most rememberable of which is *Surry of Eagle's Nest* (1866). But in this and the related tales *Hilt to Hilt* (1869) and *Mohun* (1869), as well as in numerous later novels, he continued to practise the old manner which grew steadily more archaic as the rough and ready dime novel, on the one hand, and the realistic novel, on the other, gained ground. Toward the end of his life he participated, without changing his habits, in the revival of the historical romance which began in the eighties, but he still seemed a belated dreamer,

the last of the old school rather than the first of the new.

Less close to Cooper was another novelist who fought in the Civil War, and who gave his life in one of its earliest battles, Theodore Winthrop (1828–61). Of a stock as eminent in New England and New York as Cooke's in Virginia, he had a more cosmopolitan upbringing than Cooke: after Yale he traveled in Europe, in the American tropics, in California while the gold fever was still new, and in the Northwest. His work at first found so delayed a favor with publishers that his books were all posthumous. Time might, it is urged, have made Winthrop a legitimate successor of Hawthorne, but in fact he progressed little beyond the Gothic qualities of Charles Brockden Brown, whom he considerably resembles in his strenuous nativism, his melodramatic plots, his abnormal characters, his command over the mysterious, and his breathless style. Of his three novels — *Cecil Dreeme* (1861), *John Brent* (1862), *Edwin Brothertoft* (1862) — *John Brent* is easily the most interesting by reason of its vigorous narrative of adventures in the Far West, at that time a region still barely touched by fiction; nor should the real hero of *John Brent*, the magnificent black horse Don Fulano, go unmentioned. That Winthrop's talent looked forward in this direction rather than backward to Hawthorne appears still more clearly from *The Canoe and the Saddle* (1863), a fresh, vivid, amusing, and truthful record of his own journey across the Cascade Mountains and an established classic of the Northwest. His early death, however, closed a promising chapter. Until the arrival of Mark Twain and Bret Harte even California did not

enter fiction, and the states further north after sixty years still await their novelist, though the Canadian wilderness just across the border has been the scene of dozens of popular romances.

But Hawthorne and Cooke and Winthrop were not the characteristic novelists on the eve of the Civil War. It was the domestic sentimentalists who held the field. A brief decade endowed the nation with its most tender, most tearful classics. Then flowered Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth with *The Curse of Clifton* (1853), and subsequently with scores more to the very end of the century; Mary Jane Holmes with *Tempest and Sunshine* (1854) and *Lena Rivers* (1856); Augusta Jane Evans Wilson with *Beulah* (1859) and the slightly belated but no less characteristic *St. Elmo* (1866) — all of these ladies more or less in the *Charlotte Temple* tradition; Susan Warner with *The Wide Wide World* (1850) and Maria S. Cummins with *The Lamplighter* (1854), pious histories of precocious, flirtatious young girls; and — not so far above them — Donald Grant Mitchell with *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850) and *Dream Life* (1851) and George William Curtis with *Prue and I* (1856), these two being, however, young men who thought of themselves as essayists rather than as novelists and who afterwards took themselves to sterner tasks. Professor Ingraham gave up his blood-and-thunder, became a clergyman, and wrote the long popular Biblical romance *The Prince of the House of David* (1855). T. S. Arthur in *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* (1855) mingled weak tears with the strong drink against which his lurid romance was aimed. And these particular successes emerge from a ruck of smaller under-

takings which swarmed over the literary scene, coloring the world with pink and white, scenting it with the dry perfume of pressed flowers, quieting it to whispers and gentle sobs, neglecting all the bitter and pungent tastes of life, softening every asperity, hiding every thorn and thought.

Perhaps the best commentary upon this order of literature is to point out that whereas the dime novels were consumed by boys, and meant for them, sentimental romances fell increasingly into the hands of girls — especially of girls as molded and approved by American Victorianism. And yet it would be idle to declare that none of such books rises above the confectionery level. For a world that accepted the Victorian maiden as an ideal, *The Wide Wide World*, to take a typical instance, was a satisfying account of how she might be shaped out of the plastic material which she was supposed to be at birth. The heroine reads no novels, but she knows Weems's *Washington* and *Hail Columbia* for the sake of her patriotism and tons of hymns and Biblical texts for her piety. The Christian virtues which were supposed to be best for maidens she has steadily dinned into her: resignation, long-suffering, loving kindness, all-embracing faith and charity. She goes through the most pathetic domestic experiences, tempered by all the fires of affliction she is old enough to be scorched by. Perhaps such narratives are little nearer to reality as regards the moods and conduct of the young girls of the time than are the dime novels as regards the actual adventures of their brothers, but they must have voiced contemporary aspirations and must have shown in action what was desired by the majority of parents and by many girls themselves.

The decade was fighting romance with romance, the romance of blood with the romance of tears.

The tears of the women sentimentalists were the daughters of the tears of Richardson and the Evangelicals; the tears of Ik Marvel and G. W. Curtis were the sons of the tears of the gently secular Irving as exhibited in *The Wife* and *The Pride of the Village*. The Bachelor of the *Reveries* sits dreaming, at his comfortable hearth, the pensive dreams which the maiden of the time imagined he dreamed about the kind of maiden she imagined herself to be. The images which run through his mind are all of snug cottages and soft wives and rosy children and trim servants and lawns and gardens. In *Dream Life* he ventures somewhat further with his dreams and dips a little deeper into the felicities of bachelor reverie, but he is still a Lord of Shalott, sitting before the mirror in his safe tower. He tastes affection but no passion, longing but no ambition, piety but no religion, expectation but no experience. He stands at the very antipodes from the older dream-world of frontier adventure, and of course from the jangling world of the American fifties between the Fugitive Slave Law and the guns of Sumter. His imagination, like the fictive imagination generally, had withdrawn from the cold wind outside and was hugging itself warm over sentimental fires. Had there been less of the spirit of adolescence in its behavior, it might have sounded those richer and more permanent notes which come from the similar withdrawal of Isaak Walton and George Herbert in the seventeenth century, and might have had a larger claim upon posterity than that which lies in its lucid though fragile style and its sweetish taste

and fragrance and its steadily-fading colors. *Prue and I* has a larger claim. Not only does it have still less than the Bachelor's evangelical orthodoxy but it has a fuller, firmer, more masculine style, with certain grave tones lately contributed to the traditionary manner of Irving; and it has rather more body. The "I" of the story is substantially married to an amiable Prue who mends his trousers and understands his vagaries, which are to indulge as a spectator in the luxuries of the world he cannot afford in any other way. Castles in Spain, he argues, are never costly or impossible, for he himself has dozens. Thus did Curtis, who had already satirized the flamboyant wealth of New York in *Potiphar Papers* (1853), express the disposition of those New Yorkers who were not wealthy or fashionable to take refuge in an interior life as a protection against the increasing plutocracy of the city. That disposition is universal, and *Prue and I*, still far from forgotten, fails of being a genuine classic only by reason of the oversoftness and oversweetness which characterized the decade from which it sprang as the decade's finest purely sentimental masterpiece.

The most effective of all these sentimentalists, a writer whom, indeed, a profound passion once or twice lifted above sentimentalism though its flavor still clung to her, remarkably represents the clerical aspects of the decade, for she was daughter, sister, wife, and mother of clergymen. Harriet Beecher (1811–96), born in Connecticut, was a most thorough child of New England when she went, in 1832, to live in Cincinnati, just across the Ohio River from slave soil. Her earliest sketches and tales, collected in a volume called *The Mayflower* in 1843, deal largely

with her memories of her old home set down with an exile's affection. In 1850 she returned to New England, for her husband, Calvin E. Stowe, had accepted a professorship in Bowdoin College. There, deeply stirred by the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law, which was challenge and alarm and martial signal to all conscientious Northerners, she began *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, which on its appearance in 1852 met with a popular reception never before or since accorded to a novel. Its sales went to the millions. Over five hundred thousand Englishwomen signed an address of thanks to the author; Scotland raised a thousand pounds by a penny offering among its poorest people to help free the slaves; in France and Germany the book was everywhere read and discussed; while there were Russians who emancipated their serfs out of the pity which the tale aroused. In the United States, thanks in part to the stage, which produced a version as early as Sepember, 1852, the piece belongs not only to literature but to folk-lore.

That *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stands higher in the history of reform than in the history of the art of fiction no one needs to say again. Dickens, Kingsley, and Mrs. Gaskell had already set the novel to humanitarian tunes, and Mrs. Stowe did not have to invent a type. She had, however, no particular foreign master, not even Scott, all of whose historical romances she had been reading just before she began *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Instead, she adhered to the established native tradition, as old as *Charlotte Temple* and as new as *The Wide Wide World*, the tradition of sentimental, pious, instructive narratives written by women chiefly for women and very largely about women. Leave

out the merely domestic elements of the book — slave families broken up by sale, ailing and dying children, negro women at the mercy of their masters, white households which at the best are slovenly and extravagant by reason of irresponsible servants and at the worst are abodes of brutality and license — and little remains. Many of the pages, too, are purple with melodrama, especially in the conceptions which the parson's daughter and the professor's wife had of St. Clair's luxurious establishment and Legree's filthy menagerie. To understand why the story touched the world so deeply it is necessary to understand how tense the struggle over slavery had grown, how thickly charged was the moral atmosphere awaiting a fatal spark, even though the spark might be naïve and artless. And yet the mere fact of an audience already prepared will not explain the mystery of a work which shook a powerful institution and which, for all its defects of taste and style and construction, still has surprising power. There were other anti-slavery novels, but they no longer move, lacking the ringing voice, the swiftness, the fulness, the frequent humor, the authentic passion of the greater book.

It has often been pointed out that Mrs. Stowe did not mean to be sectional, that she deliberately made her chief villain a New Englander, and that she expected to be blamed no more by the South than by the North, which she thought particularly guilty because it tolerated slavery without the excuse either of habit or of interest. Bitterly attacked by Southerners of all sorts, however, she defended herself in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), and then, after a triumphant visit to Europe,

essayed another novel to illustrate the evil effects of slavery, particularly upon the whites. *Dred* (1856), in England known as *Nina Gordon*, has had its critical partizans, but posterity has not sustained them. Grave faults of construction, slight knowledge of the scene (North Carolina), a less simple and compact story than in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a larger share of disquisition — these weigh the book down, and most readers carry away only fragmentary memories of the black prophet Dred's thunderous eloquence, of Tom Gordon's shameless abuse of his power as a master, and of Old Tiff's grotesque and beautiful fidelity. *Dred* appears to have exhausted Mrs. Stowe's anti-slavery material, though she was, of course, a partizan and a pamphleteer during the Civil War. Thereafter, being now an international figure, she let her pen respond somewhat too facilely to the many demands made upon it till her death: she wrote numerous didactic and religious essays and tales: she was attentive to the follies of fashionable New York society, in which she had had little experience; Lady Byron chose her to publish the scandal by which the poet's wife defended herself against the dead poet.

In another department of her work, however, Mrs. Stowe stood on surer ground, and her novels of New England life do well what there was later a whole school of New England story-writers to do after her. Weak in structure and sentimental she remained. Her heroines wrestle with problems of conscience happily alien to all but a few New England and Nonconformist British bosoms; her bold seducers, like Ellery Davenport in *Oldtown Folks* (1869) and Aaron Burr in *The Minister's Wooing*

(1859), are villains to frighten schoolgirls with; she writes always as from the pulpit, or at least from the parsonage. But where no theological or melodramatic idea governs her, she can be direct, accurate, and convincing. The earlier chapters of *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862) must be counted, as Whittier thought, among the purest, truest idyls of New England, much as doctrinal casuistry clogs the narrative thereafter. It is harder — impossible, in fact — to agree with Lowell in placing *The Minister's Wooing* first among her novels, and yet no other imaginative treatment so well sets forth the strange, dusky old Puritan world of the later eighteenth century when Newport was the center at once of the ruthless divinity of Samuel Hopkins, the minister of the novel, and of the African slave trade. Mrs. Stowe wisely did not put on the airs of an historical romancer but wrote like a contemporary of the earlier Newport with an added flavor from her own youthful recollections. This flavor was indispensable to her. When her memory of the New England she had known in her girlhood and had loved so truly that Cotton Mather's *Magnalia* had seemed "wonderful stories . . . that made me feel the very ground I trod on to be consecrated by some special dealing of God's providence" — when this memory worked freely and humorously upon materials which it was enough merely to remember and record, she was at her later best. These conditions she most fully realized in *Poganuc People* (1878), crisp, spare (for her), never quite sufficiently praised, and in *Oldtown Folks*, like the other a series of sketches rather than a novel, but — perhaps all the more because of that — still outstanding, for fidelity and point

and canny, pawky humor, among the innumerable stories dealing with New England rural life.

Evangelical sentimentalism was carried on with large popular success by the Rev. Josiah Gilbert Holland of Massachusetts and the Rev. Edward Payson Roe of New York until nearly the end of the century, when others took up the perennial burden. That both Holland and Roe were clergymen is a sign that the old suspicion of the novel was nearly dead, even among those petty sects and sectarians that so long feared the effects of it. Holland, whose first novel had appeared in 1857, was popular moralist and poet as well as novelist and first editor of *Scribner's Magazine* (founded 1870). His metrical novels, *Bitter-Sweet* (1858) and *Kathrina* (1867), sweet, soft, warm, and facile, probably caught more readers than any of his tales in prose. Roe contented himself with prose fiction. Chaplain of a regiment of cavalry and of one of the Federal hospitals during the Civil War, he later gave up the ministry in the conviction that he could reach thousands with his beguiling pen and only hundreds with his hortatory voice. His simple formula included: first, some topical material, historical event, or current issue; second, characters and incidents selected directly from his personal observation or from newspapers; third, an abundance of "Nature" descriptions with much praise of the rural virtues; and fourth, plots concerned almost invariably, and never too deviously, with the simultaneous pursuit of wives, fortunes, and salvation. *Barriers Burned Away* (1872), *Opening a Chestnut Burr* (1874), and *Without a Home* (1881) are said to have been his most widely read books, though none fell un-

heeded from the presses which labored to bring forth enough of them as fast as they were written.

The greatest, however, and practically the ultimate victory over village opposition to the novel was won by *Ben-Hur* (1880), a book of larger pretensions and broader scope than any of Roe's or Holland's modest narratives, the only American novel, indeed, which can be compared with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a folk possession, and one so popular that as recently as 1913 an edition of a million copies was called for and distributed. Its author, General Lew Wallace (1827–1905), an Indiana lawyer, a soldier in both the Mexican and the Civil Wars, had already published *The Fair God* (1873), an elaborate romance of the conquest of Mexico which recalled the earlier concerns of Irving and Prescott and Robert Montgomery Bird. A chance conversation with the notorious popular skeptic Robert G. Ingersoll led Wallace to researches into the character and doctrines of Jesus which not only convinced him of the essential truth of Christianity but bore fruit in a tale, grandiose and ornate, which thousands have read who have read no other novel except perhaps *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and have hardly thought of either as a novel at all, and through which still more thousands know the geography, ethnology, and customs of first-century Judea and Antioch as through no other source. Without doubt the outstanding element in the story is the sufficiently un-Christian revenge of Ben-Hur upon his false friend, Messala, a revenge which takes the Prince of Jerusalem through the galleys and the palæstra and which leaves Messala, after the thrilling (and to the popular taste, the classic) episode of the chariot race, crippled and stripped

of his fortune. And yet, following even such pagan deeds, Ben-Hur's discovery that he cannot serve the Messiah with the sword does not seem quite an anticlimax, though the conclusion, dealing with the Passion, like the introductory chapters on the meeting of the Magi, falls below the level of the revenge theme in energy and simplicity. Compared with other romances of the sort, however, with William Ware's or Ingraham's, for instance, *Ben-Hur* easily passes them all, by a vitality which probably has a touch of genius. It passes, too, Wallace's third romance, written while he was ambassador to Turkey, *The Prince of India* (1893), a long, dull performance with the Wandering Jew as the principal performer.

CHAPTER VI

HOWELLS AND REALISM

1. New Frontiers and Old Settlements

After the weeping fifties came the Civil War, which broke the pattern, though at the time it contributed little to the mode of fiction except new materials for the incessant popular romancers who turned their pens from the past to the present without any change as regards sensationalism. What the wicked Tory or the fierce Indian had been, the crafty Confederate or the cruel Federal — it depended upon the section to which the novelist was native — now became. The cloudy atmosphere and turgid style of the old romance wrapped themselves promptly around the new events and assisted in the process which, while the wounds of the struggle were still raw, began to transform it into an epic memory. That memory, however, had to wait a generation before it achieved any considerable maturity. Meanwhile, another tendency in fiction dispossessed the sentimentalism which had dispossessed the school of Cooper.

After the Revolution there had sounded from many literary throats the cry that the new nation ought to have an epic, as Greece and Rome and medieval Catholicism and English Puritanism had had; and although nothing great had been forthcoming the demand persisted until the middle

of the next century. Then it had gradually given way before the idea that, as Simms pointed out, prose fiction is the modern epic form. Criticism came therefore to demand "The Great American Novel," not so much to enshrine the national past as to reflect the national present on a scale commensurate with the new consciousness. Although this expectation, too, was disappointed, it undoubtedly had something to do with the rapid rise of the fashion of local color, which may be thought of as initiated by Bret Harte's story, *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, in 1868, and which for some thirty years gave a dominant type to imaginative writing in the United States. The war had stirred the surface of various provincialisms which now discovered themselves and one another. In 1869 Mrs. Stowe in *Oldtown Folks* celebrated the manners of village New England; two years later Richard Malcolm Johnston did the same for Georgia with his *Dukesborough Tales* and Edward Eggleston for the Indiana frontier with *The Hoosier School-Master*. These pioneers were shortly followed in almost every quarter of the country: by George Washington Cable in New Orleans, by Constance Fenimore Woolson in the Great Lakes region, by Sarah Orne Jewett in New England, by Joel Chandler Harris among the negroes, by Mary Noailles Murfree ("Charles Egbert Craddock") in the Tennessee mountains, by Thomas Nelson Page in Virginia; and thereafter by an increasing multitude who strove, apparently, to furnish the country with an ordnance survey of all its riches of local custom. In the North, where the idea of "The Great American Novel" had been strongest, a good many writers and readers gave themselves to the new vogue in a romantic

enthusiasm for glorifying the total national picture; in the South, the prevailing mood was a passion for displaying the depth and charm of the society which had received a mortal blow from the war. Too many in both sections regarded local color as a garment which, when worn by a story, called for a swagger or an elegance in the action which was not natural to it; others regarded the garment as a sufficient thing in itself and nearly dispensed with the flesh and blood of narrative; too many, also, where the color was already thin, beat it thinner. Nevertheless, the episode contributed something to the advance of realism. Scenes could no longer be unlocalized; costume and dialect had to be reported with accuracy; characters and plots must consequently be fitted, more or less, to the actual circumstances among which they moved. The ordinary methods of local color, no less than doctrines of realism imported from Europe or than those Americans who espoused the doctrines, cleared the way for a critical conflict between romance and realism. Granted, controversy finally ran, that real persons and events should of course be represented, ought they to be merely everyday persons and events exhibited to the life or ought they instead to be selected with a view of making more of heightened moments and superior men and women than could be made of commonplace?

Bret Harte, however, and his followers fought no critical battles. Their victory was too easy. When *The Luck of Roaring Camp* was published California was the microcosm and focus of America. Every section was represented there among the gold-seekers who gave the community its picturesqueness. Every section of course read

Bret Harte with an interest compounded of curiosity about the unknown and delight in the familiar. The success of the master naturally suggested imitation, not only in regard to the local manners and types of other neighborhoods but in the very dimensions of the tales which he had thus begotten. The generation after 1870 practised the short story as no generation had ever done before. Brown and Cooper and Simms and Melville and Hawthorne and Mrs. Stowe had all indeed written short stories, but the novel had called forth their major faculties. Bret Harte, a voluminous author, wrote only one full-length novel; Thomas Bailey Aldrich, H. C. Bunner, Cable, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Hamlin Garland, Miss Jewett, Miss Murfree, Page, Frank R. Stockton, though they wrote novels, are better known for their shorter stories; Ambrose Bierce and O. Henry wrote no novels at all. There was still an economic factor, as during the days of Cooper. Until the passage of the international copyright law of 1891 British novels could be freely pirated in the United States and American competition increasingly took the form of short stories, further encouraged by the multiplication of native magazines particularly hospitable to brevity. The novel, in consequence, was left standing for a few years out of the main channel of imaginative production. Those who chose it were likely to do so because of greater seriousness or larger strength than might be needed by the story-writers who were tempted to slighter and yet more profitable undertakings.

During the sixties realism hovered in the air without definitely alighting. Oliver Wendell Holmes, for instance, in *Elsie Venner* (1861) worked his romantic problem of

heredity upon a ground of shrewd realistic observation; Bayard Taylor employed a similar composition of elements; Louisa M. Alcott in *Little Women* (1868) and Thomas Bailey Aldrich in *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870) turned away from the watery illusions which in respectable circles had furnished the substance for children's books; at the end of the decade the loud laughter of Mark Twain began to clear the scene. The distinction, however, of writing the first American novel which may be called realistic in a modern sense belongs to Colonel John W. De Forest of Connecticut, whose *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867), as William Dean Howells said, was "of an advanced realism before realism was known by that name." Not half heroic or partizan enough to suit the contemporary feeling about the war, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* missed the vogue of a war book, and when the tendency in fiction had caught up with it apparently it seemed too much a war book to fit the new taste. But no other novel of the decade has been less dimmed by a half century of realism. Coldly truthful in its descriptions of battles and camps, crisp and pointed in its dialogue, penetrating, if not over-subtle, in its character analysis, sensible in its plot, and in its general temper alert and sophisticated, it is still almost as convincing as it was once precocious. De Forest wrote numerous other novels but none so notable. All of them suffered from the rivalry of local color in its romantic phases.

While these phases originated on the frontier, so often influential in American culture, it was also on the frontier, though in another section of it, that realism took its earliest definite stand. Perhaps some bareness in the life

of the Middle West, lacking both the longer memories of the Atlantic States and the splendid golden expectations of California, discouraged romance there and set going that tendency toward naturalism which descends unbroken from Edward Eggleston (1837–1902) through E. W. Howe and Hamlin Garland, Theodore Dreiser and Edgar Lee Masters. At first glance Eggleston looks strange enough in this gallery, for like Holland and Roe he was a clergyman and nourished upon the same soft food as they. As a Methodist on the frontier, though of cultivated Virginia stock, he was even brought up to think of novels and all such works of the imagination as evil things. But his diversified experience as an itinerant preacher, or "circuit rider," and his reflective and studious habits lifted him out of these narrow nooks of opinion. It is true that he shared the customary local color motive. "It used to be a matter of no little jealousy with us, I remember," he says, speaking of Westerners, "that the manners, customs, thoughts, and feelings of New England country people filled so large a place in books, while our life, not less interesting, not less romantic, and certainly not less filled with humorous and grotesque material, had no place in literature. It was as though we were shut out of good society." He had, however, a larger and sounder motive. Whereas Mrs. Stowe or her fellows would have thought of themselves as writing fiction considerably — or even primarily — for the sake of its moral consequences, Eggleston, having read Taine's *Art in the Netherlands*, undertook to portray the life of southern Indiana in the faithful, undoctrinaire spirit of a Dutch painter, and wrote *The Hoosier School-Master* (1871). Refusing to

follow the violent and yet easy road of the dime-novelists, he confined himself to a plain tale of plain men and women, choosing for his scene, however, a backwoods district where true Hoosiers flourished at their most typical, rather than any of the more cultivated Indiana communities. His plot exists almost solely for the sake of the manners described, the backwoods sentiments and dialects, labors and amusements.

These singularities had already been exposed by Bayard Rush Hall in *The New Purchase* (1855), and there was beginning to grow up a modest literature reporting " that curious poor-whitey race which is called ' tar-heel ' in the northern Carolina, ' sand-hiller ' in the southern, ' corn-cracker ' in Kentucky, ' Yahoo ' in Mississippi, and in California ' Pike ' . . . the Hoosiers of the dark regions of Indiana and the Egyptians of southern Illinois " — a race, still not utterly extinct, which later observers think of as the " contemporary ancestors " of those modern Americans who have outgrown eighteenth-century conditions as the " poor whites " have not. All of Eggleston's essential novels deal with this aspect of America, whatever the scene: Indiana in *The Hoosier School-Master*, *The End of the World* (1872), and *Roxy* (1878); Ohio in *The Circuit Rider* (1874); Illinois in *The Graysons* (1887); Minnesota in *The Mystery of Metropolisville* (1873). Light is thrown upon his aims in fiction by the fact that he subsequently aspired to write a " History of Life in the United States," which he carried through two erudite, humane, and graceful volumes, neither of them, so abundant was his learning, able to bring the account beyond 1700. The Hoosier novels, simple in plot, clear-

cut in characterization, concise and lucid in language, unwaveringly accurate in their setting, manners, and language, are indispensable documents, even finished chapters, for his unfinished masterpiece. What has given the *School-Master* its primacy in reputation is probably nothing but its having been first in the field, though something may also be allowed for its compactness and freshness of substance; *Roxy* is more interesting, and *The Circuit Rider* quite as informing. *The Graysons* deserves credit for the reserve with which it admits the youthful Lincoln into its narrative, uses him at a crucial moment, and then lets him withdraw without a hint of his future greatness. The morals of Eggleston's tales, it is true, are over-obvious, though they are not strained or hectic. Without any rush of narrative, neither has he verbosity or inflation of style. Even where, in his fidelity to violent frontier habits, his incidents appear melodramatic, the handling is sure and direct, for the reason, as he says of *The Circuit Rider*, that whatever is incredible in the story is true. No novelist, within the range of topics Eggleston touched, is more candid, few more believable. With greater range and fire he might have been a national figure as well as the earliest American realist to leave behind him a settled classic, a true folk-book of its neighborhood.

2. William Dean Howells

From the Middle West came the principal exponent of native realism, as an author so prolific during the sixty years between his earliest book and his latest that he amounts almost to a library in himself, as editor and critic

so influential that he amounts almost to a literary movement. William Dean Howells was born at Martin's Ferry, Ohio, in 1837, the grandson of a Welsh Quaker and the son of a country printer with a passion for books. Like his friend Mark Twain, Howells saw little of schools and nothing of colleges, and like him he got his systematic literary training from enforced duties as compositor and journalist. But unlike Mark Twain, he fell as naturally into the best classical traditions as Goldsmith or Irving, who, with Cervantes, earliest delighted him. Though he did not always read, as the mellow pages of *A Boy's Town* and *Years of My Youth* attest, his reading marked his growth. In *My Literary Passions* Howells has delicately recorded the development of his taste. At first he desired to write verse, and devoted months to imitating Pope in a youthful fanaticism for regularity and exactness. From that worship he turned, at about sixteen, to Shakespeare, particularly to the histories; then to Chaucer, admired for his sense of earth in human life; then to Dickens, whose magic, Howells even then dimly saw, was rough though authentic. Macaulay taught him to like criticism and furnished him a temporary model of prose style. Thackeray, Longfellow, Tennyson, followed in due course. Hawthorne for a time dominated him, more completely a passion with Howells than any other American author ever was. Having taught himself some Latin and Greek and more French and Spanish, Howells took up German and came under the spell of Heine, who persuaded him once for all that the dialect and subjects of literature should be the dialect and facts of life.

Poems in the manner of Heine won Howells a place in the

pages of the *Atlantic*, then the very zenith of his aspiration, and in 1860 he undertook the reverent pilgrimage to New England which he afterward recounted with such winning grace in *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*. Already enough of a journalist to have been asked to write a campaign biography of Lincoln and enough of a poet to have published a small volume of poems with his Ohio friend John James Piatt, Howells made friends wherever he went and was finally confirmed in his literary ambitions. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was appointed United States consul at Venice; he was married at Paris in 1862 to Elinor G. Mead of Vermont; and he spent four exquisite years of leisure in studying Italian literature, notably Dante, as the great authoritative voice of an age, and Goldoni, whom Howells called "the first of the realists." In Italy, though he wrote poetry for the most part, he formed the habit of close, sympathetic observation and discovered the ripe, easy style which made him, beginning with *Venetian Life* (1866) and *Italian Journeys* (1867), one of the happiest of literary travelers. From such work he moved, by the avenue of journalism, only gradually to fiction. On his return to the United States in 1865 he first became editorial contributor to *The Nation* for a few months, and then served as assistant editor and finally editor of the *Atlantic* until 1881.

The literary notices which he wrote for the *Atlantic* during these years of preparation would show, had he written nothing else, how strong and steady was his drift toward his mature creed. Not alone by deliberate thought nor even by the stimulus of polemic was he carried forward, but rather by a natural process of growth which,

more than an artistic matter alone, included his entire philosophy. From his childhood he had been intensely humane — sensitive and charitable. This humaneness now revealed itself as a passionate love for the simple truth of human life, and a suspicion, a quiet scorn for those romantic dreams and exaggerations by which less contented lovers of life try to escape it. "Ah! poor Real Life, which I love," he wrote in his first novel, "can I make others share the delight I find in thy foolish and insipid face?" Perhaps *Their Wedding Journey* (1871) ought hardly to be called a novel, but it is a valuable Howells document in the method, so nearly that of his travel books, by which he takes a bridal couple on their honeymoon over much the same route, in a reverse order, that he had traveled between Ohio and Boston in 1860, and also in the zeal for actuality which makes him exalt the truth, however tedious, over any unreality however agreeable. "As in literature the true artist will shun the use even of real events if they are of an improbable character, so the sincere observer of man will not desire to look upon his heroic or occasional phases, but will seek him in his habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness." Less of such argument, though no less of implicit zeal for veracity, appears in *A Chance Acquaintance* (1873), more strictly a novel, in which Howells showed that he could not only report customs and sketch characters felicitously but also organize a plot with felicitous skill. A young Bostonian, passionately in love with an intelligent but untraveled inland girl, who returns his love, is so little able to overcome his ingrained provincial snobbishness that he steadily condescends to her until in the end he suddenly sees, as

she sees, that he has played an ignoble and vulgar part which irrevocably separates them. Nothing could be more subtle than the dramatic turn by which their relative positions are reversed. The style of *A Chance Acquaintance*, while not more graceful than that of Howell's earlier books, is more assured and crisp. The central idea is clearly conceived and the outlines sharp without being in any way hard or cynical. The descriptions are exquisite, the dialogue both natural and revealing, and over and through all is a lambent mirth, an undeceived kindliness of wisdom, which was to remain his essential quality.

Although, to judge by *A Chance Acquaintance*, he had the art of narrative among his original endowments, he had only gradually discovered it in himself. His first narrative, *No Love Lost* (1869), had been in hexameters, more or less after the manner of Longfellow and Clough. Besides his life of Lincoln, Howells wrote three volumes of travels or essays before he attempted a novel at all. *A Chance Acquaintance* made no clean break with his previous experiments, for it deals with a group of Americans traveling in Canada, three of whom had already appeared in *Their Wedding Journey*. And even the success of his novel did not turn him wholly to fiction. He continued to write criticism and began to write farces, merely enlarging his range as he developed in power. The stream of literature had never before poured from an American writer with such variety and volume. Besides his stated duties for the *Atlantic* he found time during the seventies to edit a group of autobiographies, and later to write book introductions by the dozen; he translated modern Italian poets; he scanned the entire literary horizon for

new planetaries; he was one of the most widely-read of Americans. As his curiosity never grew faint, so never did his pen, but kept up its amazing productivity without damage to the smooth surface of his style and the bland cheerfulness of his disposition.

His principal limitation — his chariness of passion and tragedy — did not entirely reveal itself in the novels which he wrote during the *Atlantic* period. Like Henry James in those same years, Howells was at first concerned with the contrast between different manners or grades of sophistication — a conflict to which his own sojourn as an American in Italy and as a Westerner in Boston had made him sensitive. *A Foregone Conclusion* (1875) and *A Fearful Responsibility* (1881) show American and Italian manners in conflict; *Private Theatricals* (published in the *Atlantic* in 1875–76 as a serial but never issued in a separate volume) and *The Lady of the Aroostook* (1879) set the social habits of the American village in contrast with those of the American city; *An Undiscovered Country* (1880) takes its characters through contact with spiritualism and Shakerism, making clear Howells's disagreement with those forms of otherworldliness; *Dr. Breen's Practice* (1881) is the story of a woman's struggle to make a place for herself in the medical profession against the stupid resistance of a public which has no objection except that women are new in that profession. Devoted as all these were to the transcription and criticism of the lighter manners of the age, they could hardly be censured for not going deeper, especially since they did what they set out to do with such ease, such dexterity, such revealing humor, such shrewd and illuminating comment. It ap-

peared, however, as the series lengthened, that Howells was not doing full justice either to his material or to himself. The conventions of Boston restricted him. He who hardly ever portrayed a Bostonian of the respectable classes in anything but unlovely attitudes: he who, though an outsider, had as editor of the *Atlantic* inherited the power in a declining literary society — he fell too much into Boston habits and confined his art too much within the respectable reticences of Boston. Not without some complaint he nevertheless accepted the fate of writing largely for women — Boston women: he came to the decision that "the more smiling aspects of life . . . are the more American." A subsequent critical generation has accused him of thus vitiating his practice while contending for a realistic precept. He dared for the sake of truthfulness to represent human beings in their "habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness" but was not willing to represent them in the hardly less habitual moods which make mankind so often illicit or savage or sordid. As a matter of fact he never consciously compromised, for he held that the lawless moods of men belong to those "heroic or occasional phases" which he left to the romancers. His novels in effect pay an extraordinary compliment to civilization on its success with mankind. Sterner critics call his compliment flattery and his shrinking from ugliness and vice a womanish defect. It has not generally been remarked how closely he stood with Emerson in the orthodox New England optimism which governed opinion in Boston at the end of its classic period — closing Boston eyes to evil and disease and pointing to theosophical anodynes.

Having resigned his *Atlantic* editorship at forty-four, Howells in the next half-dozen years brought his Boston period to its summit and conclusion. Besides certain minor novels — *A Woman's Reason* (1883), *The Minister's Charge* (1887) — he wrote *A Modern Instance* (1882), which he thought his strongest, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1884), which the public has generally found the best of his novels, and *Indian Summer* (1885), which he himself thought his best. Without the bitter tincture of pessimism which Howells lacked, realism can hardly go further than in these three. The superiority of *A Modern Instance* to all that had come before lies less in its firmer grasp of its materials, for Howells from the first was sure of grasp, than in its larger control of larger materials. It has a richer timbre, a deeper tone. Marcia Gaylord, the most passionate of all his heroines, is of all of them the most clearly yet lovingly conceived and elaborated. Her unaccountable impulses and endurances convey an impression that is completely individual. Types do not behave so. In the career of her husband, Bartley Hubbard, the journalist, Howells adroitly traces a metamorphosis from selfishness and vanity, fed in this case by Marcia's unreasoning devotion, into contemptible viciousness which has not even a dash of boldness to redeem it. Like the impulses of Marcia, the process hides itself perhaps rather too closely from the observer, who as in the case of living persons may now and then be surprised to find that the decay has gone so fast and far with so few outward signs. Writing the winter scenes of the earlier chapters Howells had the advantage of those many pens which in the past decade had wrought at the local color of New England;

he achieved something more faithful and vivid than anything yet achieved in that direction. Although done with an eye intensely on the fact, these scenes have still the larger bearings of a criticism of American village life in general. The subsequent adventures of the Hubbards in Boston, acutely local in setting and incident, are still as universal in application as any ever laid in that metropolis. Squire Gaylord's arraignment of his son-in-law in an Indiana court room vibrates with a dramatic passion seldom met with in Howells, a passion made the more emphatic by the sickening descent from a tragic occasion which follows immediately afterward in Bartley's virtual offer of his former wife to his former friend. Following such episodes it is, however, difficult to forgive Howells his apparent sympathy with Halleck in the discovery that a New England conscience will now forever hold him from Marcia because he had loved her before she was free. The attentive imagination simply refuses to be convinced; or else it finds itself disgusted at an ending no better than sentimental to a narrative heretofore full of wisdom maturely wielding the most admirable and enlightening details.

The theme of *Silas Lapham* is one very dear in a republic, that of the rising fortunes of a man who has no aid but virtue and capacity. Lapham, a country-bred, self-made Vermonter, appears when he has already achieved wealth and finds himself being drawn, involuntarily enough, into the more difficult task of adjusting himself and his family to the manners of fastidious Boston. A writer primarily satirical might have been contented to make game of the situation. Howells, keenly as he sets forth

the conflict of standards, goes beyond satire to a depth of meaning which comes only from a profound understanding of the part which artificial distinctions play in human life and a mellow pity that such little things can have such large consequences of pain and error. The conflict, however, while constantly pervasive in the book, does not usurp the action. The Lapham family has serious concerns that might arise in any social stratum. Most intense and dramatic of these is the fact that the suitor of one daughter is believed by the whole family to be in love with the other until the very moment of his declaration. The distress into which they are thrown is presented with a degree of comprehension rare in any novel, and here matched with a common sense which rises to something half-inspired in Lapham's perception — reduced to words, however, by a friendly clergyman — that in such a case superfluous self-sacrifice would be morbid, and that, since none is guilty, one had better suffer than three. A certain rightness and soundness of feeling, indeed, mark the entire narrative. As it proceeds, as Lapham falls into heavy business vicissitudes and finally to comparative poverty again, and yet all the time rises in spiritual worth, the record steadily grows in that dignity and significance which, according to Howells's creed, is founded only upon the unadorned and unexaggerated truth.

As, with the increase of the American population and the diminution of opportunity for the individual, the self-made man becomes a less outstanding figure than he was in the generation to which Silas Lapham belonged, Lapham will still continue to seem a standard example of his type. But his type is of New England and not of the

United States at large. In other sections — at least in those not dominated by New England habits transplanted — the adventures of the self-made have nearly always been more stirring, motivated by less lawful ambitions, colored by ranker senses. Lapham rises through the easy and yet compact levels of a homogeneous provincial society as law-abiding as any in the world. The clang of the larger America, the sense of the manipulation of vast forces which give the story of the self-made American its thrilling interest, do not appear in this quiet story. Moreover, Howells presents Lapham, for the most part, in his milder hours, with his wife and daughters in the plainest of households, barely hinting at the tough struggles with the world to which of course Lapham gave most of his time. Lapham represents the American magnate only as subdued to New England conditions and then further subdued to the domestic hearth. Here, Howells might probably have contended, the true and essential Lapham had his existence, at this central station of human affairs. One misses, nevertheless, the thrust and clutch and strain and sweat of actuality. The more wonder then that, lacking these, the book still seems so solid an image of the truth. Its flawless structure assists it in making the impression; so does the unfailing lucidity and unobtrusiveness of the narrative and the unimprovable conversations. And yet all this art to conceal art must have been unavailing had not the final substance, thus exhibited, been shaped out of reality itself. To say, as one may say even of this admirable story, that it does not visit the uttermost deeps of human character, is not to say that it plays over the surface. Howells's imagination has seen through and

through all the persons in *The Rise of Silas Lapham;* it has thought round and round every situation. There are three dimensions to the matter; it is a sturdy, tangible, memorable block of life. To so much Howells added what his merely professional skill could not have added: the warm, friendly atmosphere which emanated from his own benign personality.

That in 1890 he thought *Indian Summer* his best novel shows how well inclined he was toward the gayer side of his character, for in this exquisite interlude, lightly, sweetly, pungently narrating the loves of a man of forty, Howells reached his highest pitch of comedy. His touch on each page and sentence is as graceful as his spirit is unfailing from first to last. The scene he laid in Italy; its characters he chose from among those temporarily and voluntarily exiled Americans who in the seventies and eighties of the last century so tempted novelists with any partiality for satire or contrast; the moral hints, as the story unmistakably tells, that for a middle-aged lover there is much more joy and comfort in a woman his own age than in the most entrancing young girl whatever. Out of a dozen possible keys in which the theme might have been set, Howells chose — or seems to have chosen — the one best suited to the innocent branch of polite comedy. The easiest and yet wisest badinage flickers continually over the surface of a naturally moving stream of narrative so pellucid that nothing in it, event or motive or insinuation, is ever hidden from the at-all-experienced eye. The happy taste which prompted him to name it for the most distinctive and most charming of American seasons no less happily instructed him how to clothe it in a golden,

impalpable, enriching haze borrowed apparently from the season. In this autumnal atmosphere the energy of youth in the spring of its love looks awkward; the winter of wisdom is as near as the summer of desire. Only a sage could have carried the story through without falling now and then into the temptation of being too impassioned; only a poet could have done it without now and then becoming cynical and sounding elderly.

In 1882 Howells had gone to England for a visit during which he brought out a series of his works there and with them and himself charmed literary London. He seriously questioned whether he should not settle in Italy for the remainder of his life, but his passion for America proved too strong, and he came back, first to Boston, to a position of almost unparalleled influence in American letters. In his earliest *Atlantic* days he had given Henry James needed encouragement at the outset of the younger man's great career. Then and since Howells had been for Mark Twain the important critical element drawing that tumultuous humorist from burlesque and uproar to the finer art of fiction. By the middle eighties all Boston that read at all was fighting for or against Howells's principles. Promising writers, such as Hamlin Garland and Brand Whitlock, made discipular pilgrimages to him. The decade discovered a vitality and displayed a craftsmanship in novels and tales which the United States had never seen before. Of all this Howells was equally exemplar and critic. If his novels filled the air, so did his doctrines. The monthly articles which he wrote for "The Editor's Study" in *Harper's Magazine* between 1886 and 1891, though many of them were too timely to have survived,

adumbrate the labors he performed on behalf of realism. Chiefly discussions of current books, they did not concern themselves merely with aspects of fiction, but also with poetry, history, and biography, applying to them all a calmly rational temper, measuring them by generous but none the less firm canons of truthfulness. What he warred upon particularly was the adulteration of honest literature with false alloys like sentimentalism, pseudo-heroic attitudes, gaudy ornament, theatrical endings; he enjoyed and praised works of pure fancy which do not pretend to paint the fact. Hardly one of the local color writers but passed under his critical or editorial hand, and few of them but in some degree were touched by his creed. The short story as well as the novel responded to his influence; even the theater, ancient home of the tinsel which he hated, had for a time its James A. Herne trying to write plays which should be as real as Howells's stories. Moreover, though as a rule unfriendly to French realists because of his dislike of their fierce candor, Howells was constantly introducing and commending the realists of Spain and Italy and Russia.

Toward the end of the Boston period he had an eager partiality for Turgenev, his art, his poetry, his pity, his wisdom. But about 1886 a change came over Howells through his reading of Tolstoy, who became his final and greatest literary passion. "He has been to me that final consciousness, which he speaks of so wisely in his essay on 'Life.' I came in it to the knowledge of myself in ways I had not dreamt of before, and began at last to discern my relations to the race." "Tolstoy gave me heart to hope that the world may yet be made over in the image of

Him who died for it, when all Cæsar's things shall be finally rendered to Cæsar, and men shall come into their own, into the right to labor and the right to enjoy the fruits of their labor, each one master of himself and servant to every other. He taught me to see life not as a chase of a forever impossible personal happiness, but as a field for endeavor towards the happiness of the whole human family." Sincere as was his conversion, however, Howells did not turn preacher as Tolstoy had done, and as his radical admirers expected. At fifty he could hardly undergo any more considerable change than that his sympathies should be enlarged and his utterance even further mellowed by the tides of benevolence and brotherhood which all his life had been rising within him and now knew themselves. Tolstoy's way was impossible to Howells's will because Howells was a saint not of the other world but of this, a walker of amiable, companionable paths, too friendly for the solitude of the natural martyr, too kindly for the battles of the natural warrior. Others might grow angry for the sake of increasing peace, but Howells could not. Others for the sake of humanity might exchange an art for a mission, but Howells could not. The many books he subsequently wrote show him no less sunny and affectionate than before, though he had now a new eye for social injustices. In his Utopian romances, *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894) and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907), without compromise with the economic system under which he had been bred, he threw it incontinently over — though how urbanely and serenely! — in favor of the system of his imaginary Altruria, where all work is honorable and servants are unknown, where capital

and interest are only memories, where equality is complete, and men and women, in the midst of beauty, lead lives that are just, temperate, and kind. Besides these exotic matters Howells touched closer ones. No man spoke out more firmly or ringingly on behalf of the Chicago "anarchists" or against the annexation of the Philippines and the attendant saturnalia of imperialism. Had he been by disposition a fighting man he might have become a national voice. Not being that, he led his art if not his nation.

Tolstoy's novels seemed to Howells as excellent as his doctrine. "To my thinking they transcend in truth, which is the highest beauty, all other works of fiction that have been written. . . . He has not only Tourguenief's transparency of style, unclouded by any mist of the personality which we mistakenly value in style, and which ought no more to be there than the artist's personality should be in a portrait; but he has a method which not only seems without artifice, but is so." Howells must have understood that the artlessness of Tolstoy is only apparent, must have learned, then or later, how painfully Tolstoy toiled at his art; still it was hardly more than critical hyperbole to say that, compared to other novelists, Tolstoy was a mirror of nature and had no art but nature's own of growth. Howells himself having been in all his novels singularly unartificial, those written after he had read Tolstoy could exhibit no new methods. He merely broadened his field and deepened his inquiries.

A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889), in which Basil and Isabel March, the bridal couple of *Their Wedding Journey*, give up Boston, as Howells himself had just

done, for a future in New York, is not content merely to point out the unfamiliar fashions of life which they meet but is full of conscience regarding the evils of the modern social order. Or rather, Howells had turned from the clash of those lighter manners which belong to comedy and had set himself to discuss the profounder manners of the race which belong to morals and religion. He wrote at a moment of hope, at the end of a decade which had disturbed the heavy stagnation following the Civil War: "We had passed," he afterwards said, "through a period of strong emotioning in the direction of the humaner economics, if I may phrase it so; the rich seemed not so much to despise the poor, the poor did not so hopelessly repine. The solution of the riddle of the painful earth through the dreams of Henry George, through the dreams of Edward Bellamy, through the dreams of all the generous visionaries of the past, seemed not impossibly far off." In this mood Howells's theme compelled him so much that the story moved forward almost without his conscious agency, "though," he carefully insists, "I should not like to intimate anything mystical in the fact." *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, which encountered greater immediate favor than any of his previous novels, outdoes them all, and the subsequent ones too, in its conduct of different groups of characters, in the perfect naturalness with which now one and now another rises to the surface of the narrative and then retreats at the due moment without a trace of management. New Englanders, Southerners, Westerners, all appear in their true native colors, as do various ranks of society, and many professions, in their proper dress and gesture.

The episode of the street-car strike, brought in near the end, dramatizes the struggle which has heretofore been in the novel rather a shadow than a fact; but Howells, artist first then partizan, employs it almost wholly as a sort of focal point to which the attention of all his characters is drawn, with the result that, having already revealed themselves generally, they are more particularly revealed in their varying degrees of sympathy for the great injustice out of which class war arises.

To call the *Hazard* the best novel of New York, as it has been called, is still to admit that the whole of that vast picture has yet not been drawn. Howells wrote from the point of view of the older America which in 1889 was mystified at labor unrest and horrified at a strike; the America in which the country had been one with the towns, and the villages had ruled them both; the America which knew the thunder and smoke of the industrial nation less as realities in themselves than as new problems crowding in upon the older order of Americans. So New York was for Howells, in spite of his fine sympathies, a community of established Americans moving somewhat gingerly among its immigrants, and not a new Rome or a new Constantinople for the Western hemisphere. The book partially suggests a volume of travels in a city where the traveler lives with the ruling class, without digging very deeply into the commoner soil of life, except as he encounters some chance individual who belongs with the unprivileged or who out of conscience consorts with them in the hope of lightening their burdens. Howells's sympathies were as wide as the metropolis, but his knowledge was restricted. For this reason his narrative seems quiet

by comparison with the jagged, multicolored, whirling, rowdy, gorgeous reality which even then lay under his eyes and which since that day has grown in a hundred respects out of its former likeness. This deficiency of depth and texture in the background, however, of qualities which Howells was too newly come to New York to have been able to capture, does not deprive the story of a very real substance, solidly conceived, felicitously portrayed, and warmed with a quick wit and an affectionate understanding.

The thirty years yet remaining of Howells's life brought no marked new development. In 1891 he summed up his critical position in *Criticism and Fiction*, declaring "I am in hopes that the communistic era in taste foreshadowed by Burke is approaching, and that it will occur within the lives of men now overawed by the foolish old superstition that literature and art are anything but the expression of life, and are to be judged by any other test than that of their fidelity to it"; and at the same time declaring, as if to set limits to the naturalism thus implied, that "[if] a novel flatters the passions, and exalts them above the principles, it is poisonous." The next year Howells succeeded George William Curtis in "The Easy Chair" of *Harper's* and wrote thenceforth monthly articles which, less exclusively literary than those in "The Editor's Study," carried on the same tradition. There and elsewhere his light, practised pen kept pace with American literary production, commenting on new authors and tendencies with an unwearied generosity which still never violated his central principles. Reminiscences and travels assumed a larger part in his work. After *A Boy's Town*

(1890) and *My Literary Passions* (1895) came *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (1900), classic account of the silver age of Boston and Cambridge which Howells had lived through. He revisited Europe and left records in various books which occasionally drew his matter out thin but in which he was never for a page dull or untruthful or sour. *My Mark Twain* (1910) is incomparably the tenderest of all the interpretations of Howells's great friend. *Years of My Youth* (1916), written when its author was nearly eighty, is the work of a master whom age had made wise and kept strong. In 1909 he was chosen president of the American Academy, and six years later he received the National Institute's gold medal for "distinguished work in fiction." He died in 1920.

His later novels make up so long a list that some of them must go unnoted, though all, if not invariably profound, are invariably kind, gay, and mellow. In them his investigation moves over a wide area which includes the somber study of a crime in *The Quality of Mercy* (1892); the keen statement of problems in *An Imperative Duty* (1892) and *The Son of Royal Langbrith* (1904); happier topics as in *Miss Bellard's Inspiration* (1905); the sound realism of *The Landlord at Lion's Head* (1897) and *The Kentons* (1902); and, it should be remarked, subtle explorations of what is or what seems to be the supersensual world in *The Shadow of a Dream* (1890), the two volumes of short stories *Questionable Shapes* (1903) and *Between the Dark and the Daylight* (1907), and *The Leatherwood God* (1916). This last, the study of a frontier impostor who proclaims himself a god, as an actual person had once done in early Ohio, best hints at Howells's views of the

relation between the real world which he had so long explored and those vast spaces which appear to be beyond it for the futile tempting of religionists and romanticists. The maturest Howells, like the Mark Twain whose *Mysterious Stranger* appeared in the same year as *The Leatherwood God*, speculated much upon such matters, but without losing himself in them. In *The Kentons* Howells most perfectly exemplifies his later reading of the actual world. "You have done nothing more true and complete," wrote Henry James about the book, "more thoroughly homogeneous and hanging-together, without the faintest ghost of a false note or a weak touch." Returning to the Middle West of his youth Howells took a family thence to New York and then to Holland, with all the freshness and point of his first period exposing the contrasts between their Ohio manners and those of the other regions which they visit. More than ever he is sage first then satirist: "remember," says Judge Kenton in a speech which sounds none the less like him for being so much like Howells, "that wherever life is simplest and purest and kindest, that is the highest civilization." Without contending on behalf either of his Ohioans, with their little angularities and large virtues, or of his experienced worldlings, with no angularities at all and their virtues more considerably mixed with manners, Howells interprets both with the lucid intelligence of an angel smiling at a beloved community of men. He sets forth an acute conflict of emotions with regard to Ellen Kenton and her love affairs but never once raises his voice above the natural human dialect; he flawlessly hits off that absurd adolescent, Boyne Kenton, who has read too many international romances,

but he never once condescends to the boy or winks over his head at the beholders. The relations of Kenton and his wife and of both of them to their children are presented, though so easily, with the nicest shades of distinction, as if their creator not only seemed to employ no artifices but did employ none. Only the masters of narrative can tell a story which, like this, is clear yet full, continuous yet unhurried, balanced yet as natural as the flow of water or the movement of clouds across a blue sky. If not a great novel *The Kentons* is still a perfect one.

It is to the difficult distinction between perfection and greatness that critical discussions of Howells always finally arrive. With few authors as eminent does it seem so hard to find the master conveniently distilled in a few masterpieces ready for transportation to posterity. His hand, like Andrea del Sarto's, worked flawlessly from first to last, but never quite supremely. *A Chance Acquaintance*, *A Modern Instance*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *Indian Summer*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, *The Kentons*, all admirable, do not stand more than measurably forth from the remainder of his novels. He must be studied rather in his total work, as the intimate historian of his age, who produced the most extended and accurate transcript of American life yet made by one man. Geographically, indeed, he was limited in the main to Ohio, New England, and New York, and to those parts of Europe and America in which Ohioans, New Englanders, and New Yorkers spend their vacations. He was conditioned, too, by his historical position as editor and arbiter so long in Boston at the declining end of an epoch, when taste ran rather

to discipline than to variety or vividness, rather to decorum than to candor, rather to learning than to experience, rather to charm than to passion. Howells, indeed, instead of resting on the palms and laurels he already had, rose to meet the new world, contending as well as he could in his natural silver tone with the alternating tones of gold and iron which have lately dimmed the voice of Boston. But that in his creed and his temperament which had made him amenable to Boston lay deeper than its influences. On every ground he preferred to walk close to the commonplace, believing that the true bulk of life is always to be found there. "It will not do," he wrote, speaking in *Their Silver Wedding Journey* of the ducal palace at Weimar, "to lift either houses or men far out of the average; they become spectacles, ceremonies; they cease to have charm, to have character, which belong to the levels of life, where alone there are ease and comfort, and human nature may be itself, with all the little delightful differences [which are] repressed in those who represent and typify." Does not Howells here reveal himself as the most democratic of novelists? Fenimore Cooper and Hawthorne, both democrats, could still never leave off complaining that democracy lacks the elements of saliency and color upon which they thought the prosperity of the novelist depends. What his predecessors shrank from, Howells ardently embraced, thoroughly satisfied to portray the plain universe which lay before him, in a style which, as he said of that of Jane Austen, whom he preferred to all the novelists in English, is "the elect speech of life expressing itself without pretending to

emotions not felt, but finding human nature sufficient for its highest effects."

The question is whether Howells's practice matched the serene consistency of his creed; and the truth is that he shrank from some of its consequences. His gentle nature would not permit him to follow men out of the cheerful sun into those darknesses of the mind and the soul which also belong to the commonplace. He clung to the day as Hawthorne to the night. Having planned just after *A Modern Instance* to write a novel which should take some of its characters to Hong-Kong, he abandoned it because in "reading up" for his Chinese chapters he had come across details of the night side of the city which horrified and disturbed him into unwillingness to touch the material again. Like Emerson, he closed his eyes to evil and its innumerable traces. His America, transcribed so fully as it is, is still an America of the smooth surfaces. Great peaks of drama do not rise upon it; passion does not burrow into it nor adventure run over it with exciting speed. Not quite as a Puritan or a pedant, Howells none the less employed a selective, a respectable, an official realism. He chose his subjects as a sage chooses his conversation, decently. To state these limitations is, however, to accuse Howells of nothing worse than the uncommon sin of too much gentleness. They ask him to stand on the mountain of fame a little further off from Ibsen and a little nearer Irving; nearer Thackeray than Tolstoy; nearer Daudet than Balzac. They remind his austerer critics that Goldsmith has outlasted a dozen austerer novelists. They challenge the historian to assert that

work artistically flawless, which lacks malice or intensity, cannot be kept alive by ease and grace and charm, by kind wisdom and thoughtful mirth. Perhaps just his excess of gentleness, like his perfection of art, was needed to civilize American fiction by bringing it home from the frontier to the daily life of the settlements.

CHAPTER VII

MARK TWAIN

Of the major American novelists Mark Twain derived least from any literary, or at any rate from any bookish, tradition. Hawthorne had the example of Irving, and Cooper had that of Scott, when they began to write; Howells and Henry James instinctively fell into step with the classics. Mark Twain came up into literature from the popular ranks, trained in the school of newspaper fun-making and humorous lecturing, only gradually instructed in the more orthodox arts of the literary profession. He seems to most eyes, however, less indebted to predecessors than he actually was, for the reason that his provenience has faded out with the passage of time and the increase of his particular fame. Yet he had predecessors and a provenience. As a printer he learned the mechanical technique of his trade of letters; as a jocose writer for the newspapers of the Middle West and the Far West at a period when a well established mode of burlesque and caricature and dialect prevailed there, he adapted himself to a definite convention; as a raconteur he not only tried his methods on the most diverse auditors but consciously studied those of Artemus Ward, then the American master of the craft; Bret Harte, according to Mark Twain, "trimmed and trained and schooled me"; and thereafter, when the "Wild Humorist of the Pacific

Slope," as it did not at first seem violent to call him, came into contact with professed men of letters, especially Howells, he had already a mastership of his own, though in a second rank.

To be a " humorist " in the United States of the sixties and seventies was to belong to an understood and accepted class. It meant, as Orpheus C. Kerr and John Phœnix and Josh Billings and Petroleum V. Nasby and Artemus Ward had recently and typically been showing, to make fun as fantastically as one liked but never to rise to beauty; to be intensely shrewd but never profound; to touch pathos at intervals but never tragedy. The humorist assumed a name not his own, as Mark Twain did, and also generally a character — that of some rustic sage or adventurous eccentric who discussed the topics of the moment keenly and drolly. Under his assumed character, of which he ordinarily made fun, he claimed a wide license of speech, which did not, however, extend to indecency or to any very serious satire. His fun was the ebullience of a strenuous society, the laughter of escape from difficult conditions. It was rooted fast in that optimism which Americans have had the habit of considering a moral obligation. It loved to ridicule those things which to the general public seemed obstacles to the victorious progress of an average democracy; it laughed about equally at idlers and idealists, at fools and poets, at unsuccessful sinners and unsuccessful saints. It could take this attitude toward minorities because it was so confident of having the great American majority at its back, hearty, kindly, fair-intentioned, but self-satisfied and unspeculative. In time Mark Twain partly outgrew this

type of fun — or rather, had frequent intervals of a different type and also of a fierce seriousness — but the origins of his art lie there. So do the origins of his ideas lie among the populace, much as he eventually outgrew of the evangelical orthodoxy and national complacency and personal hopefulness with which he had first been burdened. The secret alike of his powers and of his limitations must be looked for in the dual, the never quite completed, nature which allowed him on one side to touch, say, Petroleum V. Nasby and on the other William Dean Howells.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in 1835 at Florida, Missouri, a cluster of houses which the boy's father, in something the fashion of Judge Hawkins in *The Gilded Age*, confidently expected to become a metropolis. As it did not, the family soon removed to Hannibal, in the same state, which was on the Mississippi and so daily witnessed if not shared the river's prosperity. There Clemens passed a boyhood and youth nearly as irresponsible as Huckleberry Finn's and nearly as imaginative and mischievous as Tom Sawyer's. Neither studious by nature nor offered even tolerable opportunities for study, he left school at twelve upon the death of his father, and was apprenticed to a printer in the town. For three years with him and later for three years more with his own elder brother, who had bought a newspaper, Clemens worked in this department of literature, beginning as well to write jokes and whimsical skits in the manner approved up and down the river. Then he carried his trade into a larger world, seeing the sights as a skilled workman could then see them in New York, Philadelphia, Washington,

Keokuk, and Cincinnati, and finally in 1857 planning, as his visionary father before him might have done, to go to Brazil to pick up a fortune. Instead, however, a chance conversation with a pilot on the Mississippi decided him to enter the pilot's profession, to which practically every boy in the river towns then aspired.

If Mark Twain's years as a printer represent a more or less academic aspect of his training, his four years as a pilot are its technical aspect. His *Life on the Mississippi* makes clear how exacting his new profession was; how much erudition it called for to know twelve hundred miles of shifting current by day or night, with absolute certainty; how much responsibility for life and property lay in his hands. His powerful mind absorbed the necessary knowledge easily. His spirit delighted in the authority and prominence which his position gave. He had now a point of vantage from which he could look down on the whole pageant of the Mississippi. And that was a spectacle such as modern life has afforded at only a few times and in a few places. An enormous commerce flowed up and down the river, attended by every hue and condition of mankind. The United States filed by under the pilot's observation: merchants about their business, planters on their occasional visits to the towns, laborers looking for work, immigrants on the way to new homes, curiosity-seekers and pleasure-hunters, slaves and slave-traders, stowaways and visiting noblemen and sportsmen. So much traffic called for a vast machinery to move it and entertain it and prey upon it: steamboats which competition forced to be swift and beautiful; skilled navigators, with the pilots chief among them; crews for the boats and

roustabouts for the landing-stages; shipping agents, shore hotels, musicians, gamblers, and harpies of another sex. All these Mark Twain had an opportunity to observe at an age when most future authors are still at their books. He absorbed them as thoroughly as the lore of his craft. "In that brief, sharp schooling," he later wrote, "I got personally and familiarly acquainted with all the different types of human nature that are to be found in fiction, biography, or history."

The Civil War, however, ended this vivid chapter, and the pilot for whom there was now no longer a vocation, after a brief period of comically bloodless service in the Confederate army, became a wanderer again, starting off by stage-coach across the plains with his brother, lately appointed secretary of the Territory of Nevada. Then followed nine years of travel and adventure by far the most varied which had ever gone into the making of an American novelist. There was too much of the sanguinary in his Clemens blood for Mark Twain to resist the temptations to huge and easy wealth which the Far West offered; he tried for gold and silver, bought in mining stock, took up timber claims. And there seemed to be little either in himself or in the lax society of the West capable of directing him to the literary career for which his powers were being assembled. A writer, however, he did become, picking up local items for the Virginia City *Enterprise* and reporting the sessions of the legislature at Carson City. Here in 1863 he first used the name "Mark Twain," a leadsman's term which he recalled from the Mississippi and which had, indeed, already been used by another writing pilot. The same year Mark Twain met Artemus

Ward, then lecturing in Virginia City, and was pleased with his praise. The year following, having been forced to leave Nevada by participation in a farcical duel, Mark Twain took himself to San Francisco, where he wrote for various papers and came under the tutelage of Bret Harte. While there he wrote the *Jumping Frog* story which Artemus Ward wanted to use in a volume of his own but which instead appeared in a New York newspaper late in 1865 and tickled the country. A trip to the Sandwich Islands still further enlarged Mark Twain's horizon and his journalistic reputation. In 1866 he tried humorous lecturing with unequivocal success, made money, traveled to the East by the way of Panama, convulsed New York at Cooper Union, and in 1867 sailed for the Mediterranean and Palestine on an excursion of which he became the hilarious chronicler in his first important book, *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869.

The sudden, the almost explosive fame which the book brought him sharply lights up the taste of the period which produced it. Of the older American schools the Knickerbockers had ceased to exist; in New England Hawthorne and Thoreau were dead and the creative vitality of their generation had waned. The rising men of genius looked to Europe for their guides: Whistler was established in London; Henry James was being sealed to the Old World; even Howells, loyally native as he was, worked upon his native material with the most classical tools. Only Whitman had stayed relentlessly at home, and he was still speaking prophecy out of a dim and narrow cloud. Upon this scene Mark Twain burst with a ringing American hurrah, a " powerful uneducated person " of the

sort Whitman had promised. Once more the frontier came back upon the older communities as it had done under Andrew Jackson, when David Crockett was a nine-days' wonder. But Mark Twain was more than a shrewd, barely literate backwoodsman. He had a tumultuous rush of expression; he had, moreover, thanks to Artemus Ward and his fellows, a literary form already prepared for him. Being expected, as a humorist of that type, to employ burlesque, he employed it to make fun of ecstatic travelers, particularly of those whose ecstasy followed the guidebook rather than their own taste and always rose with the reputation of the thing seen. Being expected, too, to be irreverent for humorous effect, he laughed at everything that did not seem to him overpoweringly sacred, and even from sacred moods often extricated himself with a jest. These were the conventions of his order. And as he was individually a husky, unashamed Westerner, when he found much in ancient art and scenery that, to his limited appreciation, fell below what he had heard of it, he said so in a loud voice irritating to fastidious ears. His public, however, was not fastidious. Relieved by the absence of that note of breathlessness which had oppressed it in earlier travel books, it gasped and then roared. Here was a writer who scratched the surface of American culture and found beneath it the rough, insouciant, skeptical, hilarious fiber of the pioneer. Undoubtedly *Innocents Abroad* flattered the mob with the spectacle of free-born Americans romping through venerable lands and finding them on so many counts inferior to America. The practical jokes of the book have lost much of their power to entertain; nor do the purple pages on which Mark Twain set down,

in beadrolls of glorious names, his sense of the might and thunder of antiquity now sound so eloquent as they probably sounded in the sixties. But sweep and vigor and jolting contrasts and pealing laughter have not deserted the book. It remains an essential document in the biography of Mark Twain and in the history of American civilization.

If confessed mendacity playing around facts can transform them into fiction, both *Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It*, published in 1872, approach the novel. Contemporary readers thought of them as reasonably true, allowing the author, however, the large license of the successful liar. Now that Mark Twain is no longer in the news his actual exploits concern his readers less and less in comparison with the permanent elements contributed to his work by his elaborating imagination. These elements play a larger part in *Roughing It* than in *Innocents Abroad*. Having " taken down " the Old World as measured by the New, he now set up the New in a rollicking, bragging picture of the Great West where he had acquired his standards of landscape and excitement. His account, shaped to look like autobiography, takes him from St. Louis across the plains to the Rockies and on to California and Hawaii. But, unlike the story of the *Innocents*, this was not written day by day with the events still green in the mind. They had had time to ripen in the imagination and to take on a significance which the deepest impression can never have at the first moment. *Roughing It* is uneven in tone and in excellence: the exposition falls below the description, which is ordinarily florid, and neither can equal the narration, particularly when it runs lustily

across the plains with the rocking stage-coach or when it carries the narrator through his maiden adventures in the mining camps. Although he too frequently falls into the burlesquing habits which still clung to him from his days of Nevada and California journalism, he also rises decisively above them, and above all his predecessors in popular humor, with chapters of genuine poetry, of an epic breadth and largeness, commemorating free, masculine, heroic days.

The tumultuous vogue of these books urged Mark Twain to new efforts in which his herditary ache for sudden wealth — an ache never discouraged by his Western failures — regularly influenced his literary impulses. His marriage in 1870 to Olivia Langdon of New York, by bringing him into a wealthier and more formal circle than he had known before, still further influenced him. He made plans for being a sort of captain of letters: he would mine his literary ore for lectures, smelt it into newspaper and magazine articles, refine it into books which he would print, publish, and distribute, taking out a large profit for himself from every process. To this extent he shared in the furor of exploitation which followed the war and against which he had no artistic ideals to fortify him. Energy so immense as his could not lightly be held within bounds. Moreover, he had the contention in himself between his original nature, lyrical, explosive, boisterous, and the restraints which he accepted without much question from his fastidious wife and the classical-minded Howells. Between them the two contrived to repress some of his tendencies, those toward blasphemy, profanity, the wilder sorts of impossibility, and also toward satire and

plain-speaking. How far he was shorn of real powers no one can say; one can say, however, that under these intenerating censors he moved from the methods which produced *The Innocents Abroad* to those which produced *Huckleberry Finn* and *Joan of Arc*.

The year after his marriage he went to Hartford, where he lived for seventeen years, with intervals of lecturing and occasional sojourns in Europe. At Hartford lived also Mrs. Stowe and Charles Dudley Warner; and with Warner, who to the Mark Twain of that period seemed an important man of letters, he collaborated in a novel, *The Gilded Age*, which appeared in 1873. The more conventional elements in the book, the Easterners, Philip Sterling and Henry Brierly, and their loves and fortunes, are Warner's; the more original, the sections portraying Western life and satirizing Congress and Washington, are Mark Twain's. His, too, is the masterly conception of Colonel Beriah Sellers, the man of hope, who lives constantly in the expectation of an avalanche of unearned increment in his direction. From the collaboration of two such different authors nothing unified could come. Warner's chapters are usually tame; Mark Twain's are often noisy and busy with his old burlesque. Neither man shrank from melodrama or hesitated to set it side by side with the most scrupulous realism. But the materials of *The Gilded Age* are a dozen times better than its art. Perhaps all the more truly because of its lack of balance and perspective does the book reproduce the jangled spirit of the time, its restlessness, its violence, its enthusiasms so singularly blended of the sordid and the altruistic. Colonel Sellers, who has the blood of his creator in him,

typifies an entire age which had newly begun to realize the enormous resources of the continent and was mad, was ridiculous, with the fever of desire for sudden riches. The age *was* gilded. Mark Twain, just arrived from simpler regions, mocked the tedious formalisms and accused the brazen corruptions of the capital. To judge by his share of this joint record he was ready to become a national satirist and to hurl his laughter against a thousand abuses deserving scorn.

A national satirist, however, he did not become. Partly from excess of patriotism, partly from a lack of the literary seriousness which might have enabled him to hold out against the influence of his wife and of his new environment, he did not assume, at least in public, the unpopular rôle of critic. Instead, urged by Howells, he turned back to his Middle Western recollections and wrote for the *Atlantic* in 1875 his *Old Times on the Mississippi,* later included in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). *Life on the Mississippi* belongs with the most precious American books. The second part, indeed, which reports a journey Mark Twain made in 1882 to visit old scenes, rises in parts little above good reporting, though all of it conveys a sense of the deeps of many memories beneath the adventures it recounts. But the first twenty chapters flash and glow as even the highest passages of *Roughing It* had not done. Herein are set down with a crowded accuracy warmed by eloquence and affection the impressions of Mark Twain's eager youth, of his old aspirations toward the river, of his struggle to attain mastery over it, of his consummate hours as pilot. The splendor of those days had

grown upon him, not faded, and he who had once entered into their events with the flushed passions of an epic hero now wrought at them with the accomplished strength of an epic poet. In his youth observing the river without one thought that he might some day translate it into art, he had had no bias and no self-consciousness. Now he could go back in his imagination to a world seen round and whole, as men of action see their worlds. He remembered a thousand hard actualities of those elder circumstances. He remembered the dialect, the costume, the amphibious river men, "half horse half alligator" as the ancient phrase had it, the savagery, the danger, the ardors of the pilot's calling, the thick, stirring panorama of that epoch. He remembered, too, the glamor of those days, the dreams of adventure, the mystery of black nights, the glory of dawn over the yellow water when the atmosphere was full of the songs of invisible birds. And winding through all his memories, like the Mississippi winding through its continent, went the great, muddy, mysterious river which had stirred his imagination for nearly half a century.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer took Mark Twain from epic to comedy. He first planned it as a play and when he decided upon another form for it he had in mind to write a story of boyhood which, like Aldrich's *Story of a Bad Boy*, should emphatically depart from the customary type of Sunday school fiction. But its departure from a type is one of the least memorable aspects of *Tom Sawyer*. Tom and Huck are, indeed, "bad" boys; they have done more than overhear profanity and smell the smoke of pipes; they play outrageous pranks in the fashion of the

disapproved youngsters of all small American towns; their exploits have even led both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* to be at times barred by librarians in whom zeal exceeds imagination. These qualities in the heroes, however, only conform to the general quality of realism which characterizes *Tom Sawyer* throughout. To a delicate taste, indeed, the book seems occasionally overloaded with matters brought in at moments when no necessity in the narrative calls for them. The boyish superstitions, delectable as they are in themselves, tend to lug *Tom Sawyer* to the documentary side of the line which divides documents from works of art. Nor can the murder about which the story is built up be said to dominate it very thoroughly. The story moves forward in something the same manner as did the plays of the seventies, with exits and entrances not always motivated. And yet a taste so delicate as to resent these defects of structure would probably not appreciate the flexibility of the narrative, its easy, casual gait, its broad sweep, its variety of substance. Mark Twain drives with careless, sagging reins, but he holds the general direction. Most of his readers remember certain episodes, particularly the white-washing of the fence and the appearance of the boys at their own funeral, rather than the story as a whole. To inquire into the causes of this is to find that the plot of *Tom Sawyer* means considerably less than the characters. A hundred incidents beside those here chosen would have served as well; the characters are each of them unique. Certain of them come directly from the life, notably the vagabond Huckleberry Finn and Aunt Polly and Becky Thatcher, the Gang, and Tom Sawyer himself, who,

though compounded of numerous elements, essentially reproduces the youthful figure of his creator. Such a mixture of rich humor and serious observation had never before been devoted to the study of a boy in fiction. Mark Twain smiles constantly at the absurd in Tom's character, but he portrays him in the dignity of full length; he does not laugh him into insignificance or lecture him into the semblance of a puppet. Boys of Tom's age can follow his fortunes without discomfort or boredom. At the same time, there are overtones which most juvenile fiction entirely lacks and which continue to delight those adults who Mark Twain said, upon finishing his story, alone would ever read it. At the moment he must have felt that the poetry and satire of *Tom Sawyer* outranked the narrative, and he was right. They have proved the permanent, at least the preservative, elements of a classic.

Tom Sawyer cannot be discussed except in connection with its glorious sequel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). "By and by," Mark Twain had written to Howells when he announced the completion of *Tom Sawyer*, "I shall take a boy of twelve and run him through life (in the first person)"; and he had begun the new book almost at once; but with characteristic uncertainty of taste he had lost interest in it and turned to struggle over a preposterous detective comedy which he wanted to name *Balaam's Ass*. Again in 1880 and finally in 1883 he came back to his masterpiece, published two years later. In spite of this hesitation and procrastination *Huckleberry Finn* has remarkable unity. To tell a story in the first person was second nature to Mark Twain. His travel books had so been told, no matter what non-

autobiographical episodes he might elect to bring in. But he was more than a humorous liar; he was an instinctive actor; Sir Henry Irving regretted that Mark Twain had never gone upon the stage. Once he had decided to tell the story through Huck Finn's mouth he could proceed at his most effortless pace. And his sense of identity with the boy restricted him to a realistic substance as no principles of art, in Mark Twain's case, could have done. With the first sentence he fell into an idiom and a rhythm flawlessly adapted to the naïve, nasal, drawling little vagabond. "You don't know me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer;* but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth." It has been remarked that Huck appears rather more conscious of the charms of external nature than his Hannibal prototype, Tom Blankenship, doubtless was; and of course, strictly speaking, he rises above lifelikeness altogether by his gift for telling a long yarn which has artistic economy and satiric point. But something like this may be said of all heroes presented in the first person. Mark Twain, though for the time being he had relapsed to the shiftless lingo of his boyhood companion, was after all acting Huck for the sake of interpreting him; and interpretation enlarges the thing interpreted. Tom Sawyer acquires a new solidity by being shown here through the eyes of another boy, who, far from laughing at Tom's fanciful ways of doing plain tasks, admires them as the symptoms of a superior intelligence. After this fashion all the material of the narrative comes through Huck's

perceptions. Mouthpiece for others, Huck is also mouthpiece for himself so competently that the whole of his tough, ignorant, generous, loyal, pyrotechnically mendacious nature lies revealed.

And yet virtues still larger than the structural unity thus imparted make *Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain's masterpiece. In richness of life *Tom Sawyer* cannot compare with it. The earlier of the two books keeps close home in one sleepy, dusty village, illuminated only, at inconvenient moments, by Tom Sawyer's whimsies. But in *Huckleberry Finn* the plot, like Mark Twain's imagination, goes voyaging. Five short chapters and Huck leaves his native village for the ampler world of the picaresque. An interval of captivity with his father — that unpleasant admonitory picture of what Huck may some day become if he outgrows his engaging youthful fineness — and then the boy slips out upon the river which is the home of his soul. There he realizes every dream he has ever had. He has a raft of his own. He has a friend, the negro Jim, with the strength of a man, the companionableness of a boy, and the fidelity of a dog. He can have food for the fun of taking it out of the water or stealing it from along the shore. He sleeps and wakes when he pleases. The weather of the lower Mississippi in summer bites no one. At the same time, this life is not too safe. Jim may be caught and taken from his benefactor. With all his craft, Huck is actually, as a boy, very much at the mercy of the rough men who infest the river. Adventure complicates and enhances his freedom. And what adventure! It never ceases, but flows on as naturally as the river which furthers the plot of

the story by conveying the characters from point to point. Both banks are as crowded with excitement, if not with danger, as the surrounding forest of the older romances. Huck can slip ashore at any moment and try his luck with the universe in which he moves without belonging to it. Now he is the terrified and involuntary witness of a cruel murder plot, and again of an actual murder. Now he strays, with his boy's astonished simplicity, into the Grangerford-Shepherdson vendetta and sees another *Romeo and Juliet* enacted in Kentucky. In the undesired company of the "king" and the "duke," certainly two as sorry and as immortal rogues as fiction ever exhibited, Huck is initiated into degrees of scalawaggery which he could not have experienced, at his age, alone; into amateur theatricals as extraordinary as the Royal Nonesuch and frauds as barefaced as the impostures practised upon the camp-meeting and upon the heirs of Peter Wilks. After sights and undertakings so Odyssean, the last quarter of the book, given over to Tom Sawyer's romantic expedients for getting Jim, who is actually free already, out of a prison from which he could have been released in ten minutes, is preserved from the descent into anticlimax only by its hilarious comic force. As if to make up for the absence of more sizable adventures, this mimic conspiracy is presented with enough art and enough reality in its genre studies to furnish an entire novel. That, in a way, is the effect of *Huckleberry Finn* as a whole: though the hero, by reason of his youth, cannot entirely take part in the action, and the action is therefore not entirely at first hand, the picture lacks little that could make it more vivid or veracious.

In the futile critical exercise of contending which is the greatest American novel, choice ordinarily narrows down at last to *The Scarlet Letter* and *Huckleberry Finn* — a sufficiently antipodean pair and as hard to bring into comparison as tragedy and comedy themselves. Each in its department, however, these two books do seem to be supreme. *The Scarlet Letter* offers, by contrast, practically no picture; *Huckleberry Finn*, no problem. Huck undergoes, it is true, certain naggings from the set of unripe prejudices he calls his conscience; and once he rises to an appealing unselfishness when, in defiance of all the principles he has been taught to value, he makes up his mind that he will assist the runaway slave to freedom. But in the sense that *The Scarlet Letter* poses problems, *Huckleberry Finn* poses none at all. Its criticism of life is of another sort. It does not work at the instigation of any doctrine, moral or artistic, whatever. As Hawthorne, after long gazing into the somber dusk over ancient Salem, had seen the universal drama of Hester and Dimmesdale and Chillingworth being transacted there, and had felt it rising within him to expression, so Mark Twain, in the midst of many vicissitudes remembering the river of his youthful happiness, had seen the panorama of it unrolling before him and also had been moved to record it out of sheer joy in its old wildness and beauty, assured that merely to have such a story to tell was reason enough for telling it. Having written *Life on the Mississippi* he had already reduced the river to his own language; having written *Tom Sawyer*, he had got his characters in hand. There wanted only the moment when his imagination should take fire at recollection and

rush away on its undogmatic task of reproducing the great days of the valley. Had Mark Twain undertaken to make another and a greater *Gilded Age* out of his matter, to portray the life of the river satirically on the largest scale, instead of in such dimensions as fit Huck's boyish limitations of knowledge, he might possibly have made a better book, but he would have had to be another man. Being the man he was, he touched his peak of imaginative creation not by taking thought how he could be a Balzac to the Mississippi but by yarning with all his gusto about an adventure he might have had in the dawn of his days. Although he did not deliberately gather riches, riches came.

A Tramp Abroad (1880), written about a walking trip which Mark Twain made in 1878 through the Black Forest and to the Alps with his friend the Rev. Joseph H. Twitchell, continued his now expected devices in humorous autobiography, without any important innovations. Certain episodes and certain descriptive passages emerge from the general level, but even they only emphasize the debt his imagination owed to memory. Writing too close to his facts he could never be at his richest. In 1882 he published his first historical novel, *The Prince and the Pauper*, avowedly for children and yet packed with adult satire in its account of how by a change of clothes Prince Edward, later Edward VI of England, and Tom Canty, a London beggar boy, underwent also a change of station and for an instructive period each tasted the other's fare. By some such dramatic contrast Mark Twain, the radical American, preferred always to express his opinion of monarchical societies; like the older patriots, he set hatred

for kings as the first article in his political creed. Of this important side of his nature the most characteristic utterances are to be found in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), which deserves also to be considered one of the most thoroughly typical books yet produced by the American democracy. It is typical in method and typical in conclusion. With the brash irresponsibility of frontier vaudeville it catches up a hard, dry, obstreperous Yankee, hurries him back through thirteen centuries, and dumps him, with all his wits about him, into Camelot. Speaking in terms of literary history, the *Yankee* is an anti-romance; it indicates a reaction from the sentimentalism about the Middle Ages which had recently been feeding on Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, William Morris's *Earthly Paradise*, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Pater, and now was languishing in the sunflower cult of Oscar Wilde. Gilbert and Sullivan had already satirized this cult in *Patience*, by exposing the affectations of the æsthetes who professed it. Mark Twain, partly aroused by the strictures on America of Matthew Arnold, went to work in a more burly way. Let us see, he said in effect, how this longing for the past would work out if gratified. What about the plain man under Arthur? What about plumbing and soap and medicines and wages and habeas corpus? What filth and superstition and cruelty did the pomps of feudalism not overlay? Mark Twain behaves as the devil's advocate in the *Yankee*, candidly ascribing to the sixth century the abuses of other older ages as well as its own. Perhaps, since he habitually read Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and had a natural tenderness for its chivalric postures, he

even exhibits a special animus arising from civil war within himself. At any rate, he let himself run almost without check among sixth-century scenes as he imagined them, ridiculing follies with a burlesque as riotous as that in *The Innocents Abroad*, and adding to it the more serious anger which had grown upon him. To appreciate the fun of the *Yankee* one must have been accustomed to the rowdy modes of American humor; to feel all its censure one must have at least a strain of the revolutionary. And yet persons equipped with neither may perceive the magnificent vigor of the narrative. It ranges from ludicrous to sublime; from the tears of hysterical laughter to the tears of broken pity. With such consequences a barbarian of genius might burst into the court of some narrow principality; he would shatter a thousand delicately poised decorums — many of them harmless enough — and expose a thousand obnoxious shams.

The irritation caused in England and among cultivated Americans by this slashing satire might have been allayed had Mark Twain turned his weapon toward grievances at home. Instead, his next and last large experiment in fiction was the *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, published anonymously after long incubation in 1896. His decisive preference for this among all his books may perhaps be ascribed to the unusual labor to which he was put by an unprecedented task; it may also be ascribed to a lifelong interest in Joan which, beginning as a boy's sympathy for a girl's tragic fate, finally amounted to a genuine reverence for the Maid which saw in her the symbol of innocence undone by malice and corruption.

Like his fierce essay *In Defense of Harriet Shelley* (1894) and his movingly tender *Eve's Diary* (1905), *Joan of Arc* illuminates that region in Mark Twain's nature which practised a sort of secular Mariolatry. Many American frontiersmen by their quite undoctrinal worship of womankind at large often approached the worship of the Madonna. Of course, this *Joan of Arc* pretends to be narrated by the friend and secretary of the heroine; but the authentic tones of Mark Twain again and again drown the reminiscent treble of Louis de Conte. Against a confused, somber, truthful enough background he raises the white banner of the Maid. She is herself the banner, the quintessence of a cause. He accepts the voices without a question; nor do they seem particularly superhuman by comparison with the radiant sweetness and wisdom with which he endows her. The book constitutes his answer to the charge brought up by the *Innocents Abroad* and the *Yankee*, that he lacked reverence for names made sacred to men by good report; it is proof that he commanded the accents of adoration. In its own right, however, it must rank below an imaginative achievement like *Huckleberry Finn* because it is less thoroughly grounded than that book in any real experience. Over too many chapters of *Joan of Arc* droops the languid haze which accompanied all the historical romances of the American nineties. Only in the final third, which deals with the trial and which masterfully employs the original records, does Mark Twain knit his passion with his facts in the degree which breaks down the boundaries ordinarily only too able to divide romance from reality.

After *Joan of Arc* he wrote nothing equal to it in

dimension and ambition. He gave up his house at Hartford and lived somewhat randomly, in various European cities, in New York, at Riverdale-on-Hudson, and finally from 1908 till his death two years later in his new house, Stormfield, at Redding, Connecticut. His sweetness had begun to grow weary and turn more and more insistently to thought which was neither sweet nor gay. His pessimism appears unmistakably in *Following the Equator* (1897), fruit of a lecture tour round the world which at sixty he had courageously undertaken to pay off the burden of debts due to his failure as a publisher. His great schemes for a fortune had failed; a beloved daughter died while he was on his royal progress; the antiquity of Asia appalled him. Though now a national figure, by popular suffrage *the* national man of letters, he had for some years suffered from a diffusion, if not a diminunition, of his power. *The American Claimant* (1892), returning to Colonel Sellers of *The Gilded Age* for material, and *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894) and *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (1896), had none of them fulfilled expectations naturally aroused. Even the better novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) defied the efforts he put into it and escaped his control as he wrote. Part of it moved off into unrestrained farce and had to be issued separately as *Those Extraordinary Twins;* part of it developed into the seriously conceived tragedy of Roxana and her son — but a tragedy founded on the conventional device of infants changed in the cradle. It adds something to Mark Twain's documentary value by its picture of Virginians in the West and by its principal character, Pudd'nhead Wilson. As an amateur detective he illus-

trates the interest which Mark Twain, who liked all sorts of ingenuity, took in stories of the detection of crime, an interest also illustrated by *A Double Barrelled Detective Story* (1902). But Pudd'nhead is more memorable as the village atheist, whose maxims, printed at the head of each chapter in this book and also in *Following the Equator*, so frequently express the tired disillusionment which was becoming Mark Twain's characteristic mood. "Pity," says Pudd'nhead, "is for the living, envy is for the dead."

"I have been reading the morning paper," Mark Twain wrote to Howells in 1899. "I do it every morning — well knowing that I shall find in it the usual depravities and basenesses and hypocrisies and cruelties that make up civilization, and cause me to put in the rest of the day pleading for the damnation of the human race." Some such despair of mankind had furnished a strain in his constitution from his early days. He had the frontiersman's contempt for the ordinary gestures of idealism. Judged by his simple, though inflexible, code of morals the world fell pitifully short. The human race he observed to be lazy, selfish, envious, given to lying, disposed to disease and vice and crime, fawning in adversity, tyrannical in prosperity, and at all times the dupe of countless errors. "Let me make the superstitions of a nation and I care not who makes its laws or its songs either." At the same time, Mark Twain largely lacked the outlet of misanthropy; he could not, because of his natural kindliness, help himself by laying his hatred of the race upon his fellows. His hatred came home and condemned him too. "What a man sees in the human

race is merely himself in the deep and honest privacy of his own heart." In such a companionship he pitied men more than he hated them. "Everything human is pathetic. The secret source of Humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven."

In various unendurable hours, however, Mark Twain did seek something upon which to throw off his burden. In theology a deist of the school of Paine and Ingersoll, with a tincture of modern science added to the iron conscience of old-fashioned backwoods Calvinism, he invented a machine more or less in the image of a god, and held it to account for the blunders of the world. The human individual, he argued in *What Is Man?* (written in 1898 but not printed until 1906 and then privately), is a mere automaton, without choice as to his birth or as to any impulse or thought or action, good or bad. Each decision follows irresistibly from precedent circumstances and so on back to the protoplasmic beginnings. Beliefs and resolutions cannot control behavior, which follows instinctively from the temperament with which the individual is endowed and which operates under the sleepless rule of the master-passion, the desire for self-approval. Punishment and censure are consequently meaningless; so is remorse. Mark Twain, who had no more than an amateur's learning in ethical systems, believed his doctrine of scientific determinism to be far more novel and contributory than it was. As a matter of fact, not the logical but the personal aspects of his contentions are impressive. By them he unconsciously defended himself from the savage, the morbid attacks of self-condemnation and remorse from which he repeatedly suffered for all

his peccadilloes. Only by assuring himself that no one deserves such blame could Mark Twain quiet his raging conscience. The fault lies with the bungled system on which the universe is made; with the intelligences which created it and continue to play wanton pranks upon it; still more upon any competent intelligence, if there is one, which refuses to exercise mercy and destroy the miserable race of men.

Such philosophic nihilism did not constantly possess Mark Twain during the disturbed last dozen years of his life. In *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* (1899) he produced a corrosive apologue on the effects of greed, which here overthrows all the respectable reputations in a smug provincial town. Only one of them wins pity; the others appear not as moral automatons but as responsible thieves and hypocrites. And similarly *The $30,000 Bequest* (1904) traces in a foolish couple the fatal influence of the anticipation of wealth. What Mark Twain had once thought hugely comic in Colonel Sellers he had now come, after his own hot hopes and disappointments, to regard as one of the first of follies, if not of offenses. In neither story, however, are the negligent or malicious higher powers shown at work, unless it is through the poor frailties of the men and women. *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* (published 1908 but written fully forty years before) took a very substantial sailor to heaven as the *Connecticut Yankee* had taken a skeptical mechanic to Arthur's Court. That Mark Twain originally thought his whimsy blasphemous and suppressed it so long shows how orthodox — and how unimaginative — was the social stratum from which he derived and which

might actually have winced at light references to jasper walls and pearly gates.

For intellectual energy *Stormfield* cannot be mentioned in the same breath with *The Mysterious Stranger*, written during the dark night of Mark Twain's spirit in 1898 and issued posthumously (1916). The scene lies ostensibly in sixteenth-century Austria but actually, to all intents, in the Hannibal of Tom and Huck. Boys like these make up the central group; the narrator, Theodor Fischer, is as much Mark Twain as Tom Sawyer ever was. To them comes at times a supernatural playmate calling himself Philip Traum but rightly Satan, nephew of the mightier potentate of that name. Though he plays terrible pranks upon the villagers, he seems beneficence itself as compared to them, with their superstition and cowardice and cruelty. And all the time he acts, for the three boys, as commentator upon the despicable human race, "a museum of diseases, a home of impurities," which "begins as dirt and departs as stench"; which uses its boasted moral sense to know good from evil and then to follow evil. The sole redeeming fact in human life, Philip assures Theodor in the end, is that "*Life itself is only a vision, a dream. . . . Nothing exists save empty space — and you.* . . . Strange, indeed, that you should not have suspected that your universe and its contents were only dreams, visions, fictions. Strange, because they are so frankly and hysterically insane — like all dreams, . . . the silly creations of an imagination that is not conscious of its freaks — in a word, . . . they are a dream, and you the maker of it." "I myself," says Philip, like Prospero breaking his wand, "have no existence; I am

but a dream. . . . In a little while you will be alone in shoreless space, to wander its limitless solitudes without friend or comrade forever — for you will remain a *thought*, the only existent thought, and by your nature inextinguishable, indestructible. But I, your poor servant, have revealed you to yourself and set you free. Dream other dreams, and better!"

Although it was out of such deeps of despair that there rose into Mark Twain's work the profounder qualities which lift him above all other American humorists, he nevertheless customarily lived and wrote nearer the surfaces of existence. Heretical as he might be in his theology, he nevertheless employed — when he employed anything of the sort — the Christian mythology of the Sunday school, God and Satan, Heaven and Eden, the patriarchs and the heathen, all of them referred to in a language immediately understood by the populace which, with or without faith, shared that mythology. So in his political doctrines, though privately he might be now as Utopian as Sir Thomas More and now as realistic as Nietzsche, he spoke in the American idiom as regards the usurping despots of the earth, the rights of the natural man, the superiority of republics to monarchies, the advantages of material well-being, the hope that through individual freedom and public education the human mass might be advanced to a plane never yet reached. He could rage over such abuses as Congressional stupidity and municipal graft, the brutality of the civil mob at home and the military mob in the Philippines, and yet could turn with patriotic fury against foreign detractors, as in his flaying of Paul Bourget for that critic's sharp remarks about

the United States. So also the geographical or historical culture taken for granted in Mark Twain's books was that of the average American, who knows more about Palestine than about Greece, more about Rome than about all the rest of the Mediterranean, more about England than about all the rest of Europe, more about the American Revolution and Civil War than about all the rest of history put together; who catches readily any references to Cæsar or Shakespeare or George Washington or Napoleon but not so readily those to Cato or Leonardo da Vinci or Goethe or Pasteur. And finally, the typical heroes of Mark Twain's imagined universe are of the sort considered typical in America. They walk the world, like the Yankee in medieval England, the Innocents in the Holy Land, Captain Stormfield in Heaven itself, erect and confident, neither cultivated nor colonial enough to be embarrassed, testing and measuring all things by the simplest standards. They are as clannish as provincials and as cocksure as pioneers. Occasionally obsessed by the Puritan conscience, they lack the eccentric ideals of holiness, mysticism, poetry. Although brave enough in the flesh, they rarely have the courage to be original. In the spirit they rise as high as to a certain chivalry toward women, and toward children, and to an occasional fine, heroic altruism; but they rarely rise higher. Their moral concerns are about industry, common honesty, domestic loyalty, good comradeship, sensible habits of mind and body. Profane and irreverent enough, they are generally chaste and considerate. They hold cruelty to be the principal vice and democratic friendliness the principal virtue.

The art of Mark Twain springs hardly less truly than his ideas from the American people as a whole. "I like history, biography, travel, curious facts and strange happenings, and science," he said. "And I detest novels, poetry, and theology." He would have been the last to reflect in what category his own writing fell, and he scarcely considered himself a novelist at all. For the more sophisticated in that department he had no use. He could not stand Henry James or George Eliot or Hawthorne; he found Scott an unendurable snob and Cooper a literary bungler; he developed his loathing for Jane Austen until he came to take a positive delight in uttering it in the most violent language; and his admiration for the work of Howells must be assigned to his affection for the man. Mark Twain's taste lay wholly in the direction of large actions, large passions, large scenery. That he moved so casually over the face of the earth and through the historical periods that he knew is proof enough that he possessed none of the professed realist's timidity when on unaccustomed ground. No Franklin and no later diplomatist in shirt sleeves ever felt more at home in temerarious surroundings than did Mark Twain. This same confidence, which deprived him of the austere seriousness of some men of letters, stood by him also in his methods. He did not mind a sudden change of key, but could fall from passionate eloquence to burlesque, and climb from farce to tragedy without even thinking whether this comported with the dignity of literature. Though at times he seems to have respected academic judgment too much — especially as represented by Howells and the *Atlantic's* audience — and though he latterly resented the

opinion that he was a humorist merely, he did depend in his art primarily upon the humorist's technique. "To string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities, is the basis of the American art," he said of the oral method of humor. Now the tricks of oral delivery are those he used most, whether he spoke or wrote. His rapid improvisation has the effect of flowing speech. To all appearances — which are borne out by what is known of his habits of composition — he drove his pen through his sentences at almost the rate of conversation, and had constantly a physical audience in mind. On it he tried his "wandering and purposeless" incongruities, his "slurring of the point," his "dropping of a studied remark apparently without knowing it, apparently as if one were thinking aloud." When actually lecturing he could hold, with his inflections and pauses, the attention of the most fastidious hearers as well as of the ordinary crowd, making capital of his lower moments and shading down the higher with humorous deprecation. Perhaps he never realized how far the coldness of print limited him in his control over his readers. At any rate, his methods were essentially oral. They reveal themselves in his partiality for autobiographical narrative, in his rambling sentence-structure, in his anticlimaxes and afterthoughts. Above all they are revealed in his humoristic device of occupying the stage so much of the time in his own person. For Mark Twain to practise his art was, more than with any other American writer, to exhibit and expound his own personality. The greatness of his personality was the measure of his fame.

CHAPTER VIII

HENRY JAMES

American patriotism, little less since the Civil War than before, has steadily contended that America does as well as Europe as a background for fiction, pointing to the epic dimensions and the epic hopes of existence on this continent. Less expansive critical dispositions have continued to feel that the human past of the country has not been large enough to match the landscape; that the present at any given moment has lacked the stability, the solidarity, which alone might afford the novelist a firm texture of reality in his representations; that the simplicity of American manners, being merely provincial rather than fittingly republican, renders impossible the subtleties and nuances of European fiction. Of the principal later novelists Howells held, on the whole, the broadest views. He built, with some limitations, on what he saw before him, not unconscious of Europe but aware that the way to a body of American fiction was action as well as argument and that in the production of a national literature imagination begets imagination. Mark Twain, without much reflection but with powerful instincts in the matter, wrought in the fashion of all great autochthons — as if his native land were the center of the world. Henry James, at the other extreme, never ceased to regard America as essentially an outlying region of

European, more specifically of Anglo-Saxon, civilization. The differing governments of England and the United States were simply nothing to him, who knew and cared so little for man as a political animal. For this craftsman in language it was language which outlined the empire of the English and bound its various parts together in spite of such surface matters as ocean and revolution. He was a loyalist to the tongue of England. And of course speech was for him but a symbol of all the customs which he thought of as centering in or about London and to which he drew near and nearer with a passion of return which implies an atavistic hankering in the blood. In other words, Henry James was a patriot to his race, and his final transfer of citizenship, though immediately called forth by his sense of America's procrastination in the World War, was but the outward sign of a temperamental repatriation already complete.

The process began early under the deliberate guidance of a father, Henry James, Sr., a remarkable metaphysician and theologian, who sought to make his sons citizens of the world by never allowing them to take root in any particular religion, political system, ethical code, or set of personal habits. Born in New York in 1843, Henry James had the most desultory schooling, under the most diverse teachers, in New York, Albany, Geneva, London, Paris, Newport, Geneva again, Bonn, and again Newport, studying now mathematics, now languages, reading a good deal of Latin and a little Greek, dabbling in Fourier and Ruskin, drawing a little, immersing himself in the British magazines and the *Revue des deux Mondes*, and from a very early period writing stories after the model

of Balzac. A circle which contained at once the elder Henry James and his son William was out of contact with few of the important ideas then stirring; and the father was accustomed to bring into the household many of the eminent Europeans who visited the United States from time to time. The Civil War would possibly have enlisted Henry, as it did his two younger brothers, but for his uncertain health; and it did without doubt mark him deeply. "It introduced into the national consciousness," Henry James wrote in 1879, by the "national consciousness" undoubtedly meaning his own as well, "a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult . . . [a perception] that this is a world in which everything happens." His non-participation in the war at first hand appears also to have developed — hardly aroused — in him a sense that his essential rôle was to be that of a spectator of life. At any rate, instead of going to war he went to Harvard in 1862, for some vague reason to the Law School, which touched him hardly at all in comparison with the men of letters whom he encountered in Boston or Cambridge, in particular Charles Eliot Norton and William Dean Howells. Through them he became a contributor of critical articles to the *Nation* and the *North American* and of stories to the *Atlantic* and the *Galaxy*. The "open editorial hand" which Howells held out to him from the *Atlantic* during the summer of 1868, Henry James said, "was really the making of me, the making of the confidence that required help and sympathy and that I should otherwise, I think, have strayed

and stumbled about a long time without acquiring. You showed me the way and opened me the door." New England, however, could not satisfy him. Early in 1869 he made the passionate pilgrimage to Europe which, in various forms, provides the theme for so immense a portion of his work: England, Switzerland, Italy, France in turn met his "relish for the element of accumulation in the human picture and for the infinite superpositions of history." Singular contrast between the behavior of the Innocent Abroad and the Passionate Pilgrim! Without anything like so deep a sense for history as Mark Twain, Henry James had not Mark Twain's ignorance to sustain him against the magnetic pull of Europe; nor had the younger man a touch of that indigenousness which restored Mark Twain to his original continent. Lacking any strong roots into the American soil, Henry James, though he returned to Cambridge in 1870 for two years, and after a further European sojourn during 1872–1874, for one year more, now succumbed to the centripetal pull which all along had been acting upon him, and in 1875 finally decided that his future belonged to Europe. For a year he tried Paris, where he met Turgenev and the Flaubert group — Edmond de Goncourt, Daudet, Maupassant, Zola; but he there felt too much a foreigner for comfort, and late in 1876 he settled for good in London, the natural home of his imagination.

With *Roderick Hudson* (1876) James concluded the long years of experimentation through which, as had Hawthorne before him, he seriously ascended to his art. His first novel, *Watch and Ward*, issued as a serial in the *Atlantic* during 1871, was a trivial performance. Of

the more than a score of short stories he published before his homesick hegira, he later cared to preserve but three. The discarded trifles betray a strong influence of Hawthorne, particularly *The Romance of Certain Old Clothes*, with its dusky scene laid in eighteenth-century America and its ghostly, inconclusive conclusion; *De Grey: a Romance*, the study of an ancestral curse dubiously inherited by a New York family from its European forebears; and *The Last of the Valerii*, wherein a young Roman nobleman digs up a statue of Venus from his garden and fatally reverts to the worship of her pagan loveliness. No such dominant magic as Hawthorne's, however, quite invests these tales; Henry James belonged to a different universe, with a different heaven and hell. Nor could he even as well as the Hawthorne of *The Seven Vagabonds*, for instance, succeed with little adventures into the picaresque like *Professor Fargo*, with its tawdry traveling showmen. James came nearer to achieving the considered sobriety of George Eliot, whom he admired; and he tucked himself as far as he could under the edge of the mantle of Balzac. In *Travelling Companions* is foreshadowed James's later skill in the description of ancient landscape and architecture; in *At Isella*, his habit of rounding out a story from the most flying hint; and in *The Sweetheart of Mr. Briscux*, at least in patches, his smoothly ironical, dexterously enwinding style. The stiffness and scrawniness of youth appears more obviously in his purely American stories than in those narrated against a European background, as were all the three he salvaged from these days of experiment — *A Passionate Pilgrim* (1871), *The Madonna of the Future* (1873),

Madame de Mauves (1874). Madame de Mauves is a sort of American Una among European lions, the snowy wife of a sinful Frenchman who first hates her because she will neither "submit basely nor rebel crookedly" and then melodramatically blows his brains out because, when he has fallen in love with her, she cannot forgive him. Theobald, in the affecting *Madonna of the Future*, has for twenty years nursed in Florence the vision of a flawless Madonna which he means to paint, only to find out at last that he has dawdled away his powers and chances: his adored model has grown coarse, his hand cannot execute his beautiful plan. *A Passionate Pilgrim* carries an overwrought American to England to claim a fortune, as Hawthorne's *Ancestral Footstep* had done. The plot is nearly as romantic as Hawthorne would have made it; the chief concern is the sensations of the ardent traveler in the presence of that charm which maddens, in Henry James, the "famished race." This concern, too, makes up a large bulk of *Roderick Hudson*, the account of a young sculptor who, thanks to a friendly patron, is suddenly lifted from the naked, rectangular society of Northampton, Massachusetts, and set down in Rome in the hope that something great will come of his genius under circumstances luxuriantly propitious. His vein proves thin and he goes, with unconvincing promptitude, to pieces, and then on to fall to death over a Swiss precipice. James subsequently admitted that the element of time in this novel should have been better handled; that he had borrowed more from the intensity of the dramatist than, as novelist, he could offer security for. But he still felt willing to acknowledge as his own the skill with which he

had represented the entire action — Roderick's aspiration and descent, his unfaithfulness to Mary Garland and his passion for Christina Light — through the consciousness of Rowland Mallet, who, though he does not speak in the first person, renders the narrative something the same service that Miles Coverdale renders in *The Blithedale Romance*. Without at the moment quite understanding it, James was working toward that admirable technique, in which he is practically supreme among novelists — the technique of concentration which makes his novels as compact as tales and which allows his tales to run without dilution of emphasis almost to the dimensions of novels.

Now established in London, James sedulously worked at making himself a purer Anglo-Saxon than he believed he could be anywhere along the periphery of the race, forgetful, it seems, that Anglo-Saxons are explorers and colonizers no less truly than huggers of the insular hearth. As an American with proper introductions he went into penetralia of English society which novelists in the Islands do not easily reach unless they are born to them. He learned, after a struggle and occasional relapses, to like both the weather and the manners of Britain, exposing himself to both those cooling experiences, except for a few brief visits to France and Italy, during five remarkably busy years. The critical doctrines which sustained him he collected and put forth in *French Poets and Novelists* (1888), much of it written during his earlier years on the Continent. "Realism," he said, "seems to us with 'Madame Bovary' to have said its last word"; but he felt that for the most part Flaubert's knowledge was greater than his imagination. James admired George

Sand's magnificent flow and color, which he oddly compared to that of Spenser in *The Faerie Queene,* but he thought she had too little form and too much optimism: "We suspect that something even better [than optimism] in a novelist is that tender appreciation of actuality which makes even the application of a simple coat of rose-colour seem an act of violence." Balzac, of course, James greatly preferred to either Flaubert or George Sand, for his great range and close texture: "He has against him," James however added, "that he lacks that slight but needful thing — charm." The informing imagination absent from Flaubert, the substantial texture absent from George Sand, the charm absent from Balzac — all these James found in his great master and favorite Turgenev, whom in 1874, so little had he been translated further west than Paris, it was still possible to include among French novelists. Turgenev had, it seemed to James, "a deeply intellectual impulse toward universal appreciation"; he had form and grace and tenderness and irony. When James says that "the blooming fields of fiction" can hardly show "a group of young girls more radiant with maidenly charm" than Turgenev's, or when he says that these girls "have to our sense a touch of the faintly acrid perfume of the New England temperament — a hint of Puritan angularity," the remark throws a long light ahead on James's own deep concern with the characters of women. And he must have had in mind a parallel between Turgenev and himself when he wrote that "Russian society, like our own, is in process of formation, the Russian character is in solution, in a sea of change, and the modified, modernized Russian, with his old limitations and

his new pretensions, is not, to an imagination fond of caressing the old, fixed contours, an especially grateful phenomenon." James still drew considerably, and was long to draw, upon the "sprawling continent" at his back; but he was "fond of caressing the old, fixed contours" of Europe.

He sustained his position as an expatriate in his subtle study of *Hawthorne* (1879), which he had been asked by John Morley to contribute to the English Men of Letters series and in which the recent disciple of Hawthorne, while delicately appreciating the master, wrote into almost every page his accusation of provincialism against the entire American nation. "Certain national types," he answered to Howells's comment that it is no more provincial for an American to be very American than for an Englishman to be very English, "are essentially and intrinsically provincial." If James during these acclimatizing years reflected almost constantly upon the "international situation" it was because he stood in that situation himself. A good deal of what it meant for him may be found ripely remembered in his posthumous autobiographical fragment *The Middle Years*. But he had thousands of companions under the same spell in varying degrees: those of his nationality who, the Civil War being now over and methods of travel in Europe easier than in the home-keeping days of the republic, annually swarmed to Europe for vacations of culture. Whether Henry James sympathized with their aspirations or satirized their numerous awkwardnesses in the midst of manners less casual than those of the United States, he could not overlook them or that simplicity which he

identified with provinciality. The ground they traversed furnished him a sort of literary terrain which excited his imagination precisely as the frontier, on which another set of Americans had faced the new as these Americans faced the old, had excited the imagination of Fenimore Cooper. Highly ironical as it may seem, it is still not highly fanciful to say that *The American* (1877), begun in Paris in 1875 at a time when James, though delighting in the art and companionship of Turgenev, was yet feeling somewhat excluded from French society, sprang from James's conception of a romantic American gesture quaintly like that of Daniel Boone renouncing the settlements, the gesture on which Cooper founded the character of Leather-Stocking. It was, as James subsequently explained, " the situation, in another country and an aristocratic society, of some robust but insidiously beguiled, some cruelly wronged, compatriot: the point being in especial that he should suffer at the hands of persons pretending to represent the highest possible civilisation and to be of an order in every way superior to his own." But when the opportunity for vindication came, the American, as James conceived him, " in the very act of forcing it home would sacrifice it in disgust," not out of forgiveness but out of so great a contempt for those who had wronged him that he was unwilling to touch them even in a rich revenge. Nor does the plot at large fall, in its romantic qualities, below this instigating gesture. Christopher Newman, intensely self-made and American, is in love with the widowed daughter of the intensely ancient and French house of Bellegarde, which, though the daughter loves him in return, snubs him, snatches

the lady from him, and drives her into a convent. Then, though Newman has found out that her mother and brother murdered her father, the American, making his large gesture, refuses to let the ax descend. Claire de Cintré, lovely as she is made out, belongs with the heroines who are too limp for life though not for romantic tragedy; the mother and brother, James himself admitted, in real life would have been remarkably careful to get hold of Newman's money — through marrying Mme. de Cintré to him if need be — before showing him too much scorn. Nor is Newman excessively convincing; "before the American business-man, as I have been prompt to declare, I was absolutely and irredeemably helpless, with no fibre of my intelligence responding to his mystery." Yet these imperfect elements are tangled in a fine net of charm. Though the style is sparer, sharper than James's style was to become, its texture is here firm with adroit allusions and observant wit, while the background of Paris abundantly though unobtrusively fills the picture. Vain as it must be to strive for all the perfections of Balzac, Flaubert, George Sand, and Turgenev at once, here still was something that looked toward a synthesis of their excellences — with a singular alloy from the older type of American romance which rejoiced to set the American hero patriotically up above the European crowd.

As if to redress the balance or to atone for this patriotic zeal, *The Europeans* (1878) subjects two charming persons from Europe, though with some of America in their blood, to the deadly seriousness which Henry James remembered as prevailing in the suburbs of Boston. There is caricature in his Wentworths, with their

large square house and large square consciences; there is perhaps less of it in the European cousins who find here so little use for the virtues of joy or flexibility; but the conflict of manners is nevertheless presented with nearly as much detachment as brilliance. Following it came two shorter novels — *nouvelles* — also equipoised between the hemispheres. *An International Episode* (1879), which shows an American girl insulted by an English duchess and her daughter and then taking such revenge as she can by refusing to marry the duchess's son, vexed the British, who in such matters were accustomed to look for satire entirely on their own side. *Daisy Miller* (1879) enraged the United States, where it was thought an aspersion upon American girlhood to represent an entirely virtuous but innocently daring young woman from Schenectady as conducting herself in Switzerland and Italy in a manner which confuses, and worse than confuses, a half-Europeanized young American who loves her. Fault was naturally found with Winterbourne, the man in the case, who as an American might have been expected to understand Daisy's behavior as any average American would. But of course to have found fault reveals the naïve temper of criticism in the late seventies. Henry James had done nothing more reprehensible than to make international comedy out of the situation chosen by Milton for his *Comus*. Daisy wears her rustic innocence to the revels, and, though traduced, would have emerged safely had Winterbourne been true to the simple faith of his nation. *Washington Square* (1881) James called "a tale purely American, the writing of which made me feel acutely the want of the 'paraphernalia'"

of an established civilization. This want, however, did not prevent his making a dainty masterpiece, lucid and quiet and cool, ironical yet tender, out of his story of how poor dull Catherine Sloper dreamed she had a true lover and then found he was only a fortune-hunter after all. The fashion in which James here constantly explains America to his readers, as if they were of course to be Europeans, hints that he had traveled a long way from his native shores in a half-dozen years, as indeed he had. His concern in the international situation had begun to wear thin.

It was, nevertheless, at this point in his career that he produced the first of his books which may be characterized as magnificent, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Although Isabel Archer belongs in the charming line of those American girls whom James subtly traces through their European adventures, she is more important than any who had gone before her. She is but incidentally American, made so for the convenience of a creator who chose to display her as moving across a scene already lighted by his imagination and familiarized by his art. James saw in her the type of youth advancing toward knowledge of life; of youth at first shy and slight in its innocence but flowering under the sun of experience to the fullest hues and dimensions of a complexity which might under different circumstances have lain dormant; of youth growing irresistibly to meet the destiny which growth compels. Had James belonged to another school he might have preferred a young man for protagonist; as it was he preferred to watch the more subterranean alchemies which, with the fewest possible external incidents, gradually en-

rich this sort of woman to maturity. The methods of his narrative were suggested by his theme. He would scrupulously keep the center of his subject within Isabel's consciousness, careful not to make her an egoist but equally careful to reveal her qualities by his notation of the delicate refraction which the scenes and personages of her career undergo in passing through her. Working thus, he could not skimp her story. "I would build large," he determined, "in fine embossed vaults and painted arches, as who should say, and yet never let it appear that the chequered pavement, the ground under the reader's feet, fails to stretch at every point to the base of the walls." His scene shifts spaciously from Albany to the Thames, among English country houses more ripe and ample than anything James had yet described, on to Paris, Florence, Rome — "the inimitable France and the incomparable Italy." Nothing hurries the stream of the narrative, which has time for eddies and shallows, broad stretches of noon and deep ominous pools. Isabel, being young and desirable, and like most of James's heroines allowed no career beside that incident to her sex, gets much of her education from being loved — by the too aggressive Bostonian Caspar Goodwood, by the healthy, manly Lord Warburton, by her cousin Ralph Touchett, most whimsical and wistful and charming of all Henry James's men, and by the dilettante Gilbert Osmond. She marries Osmond only to find out finally that she had been coldly tricked into the marriage by Madame Merle, whom Isabel has thought her best friend when the woman is in reality Osmond's mistress anxious to get money for their illegitimate child. Something in the intricate, never quite pene-

trable fiber of the heroine sends her in the end back to her husband for the sake of her stepdaughter, thinking, it seems, that she thereby encounters her destiny more nobly than in any previous chapter of it. The conclusion, on various grounds, does not satisfy, but it consistently enough rounds out Isabel's chronicle. Praise can hardly exaggerate the skill with which James at first warily investigates as from without the spirit of the fresh young girl, gradually transfers the action to her consciousness, and thenceforth with almost no appearance of art reduces his story to the terms of her realization of her fate. In something of this delaying fashion life dawns upon its victims. " 'Tis surely a graceful, ingenious, elaborate work," James wrote of the *Portrait* to Stevenson, who disapproved of it, " with too many pages, but with (I think) an interesting subject and a good deal of life and style." He might justly have said that as to life it was unfailing and as to style all gold and ivory.

In his next two novels, *The Bostonians* (1886) and *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) he relinquished the advantage of international contrast. The first deals with a group of American oddities somewhat stridently set on improving the status of women. Henry James himself belonged with the school of those who hold, in a phrase which must almost have driven him to a different position, that woman's place is the home. He brought to his narrative the tory disposition to satire, and filled the book with sharp caustic portraits and an unprecedented amount of caricature. His Bostonians recall that angular army of transcendentalists whom Lowell's essay on Thoreau hung up once for all in its laughable alcove of New Eng-

land history. James regards them only too obviously from without, choosing as the consciousness through which they are to be represented an engaging young reactionary from Mississippi, Basil Ransom, who invades this fussy henyard and carries away its prized heroine, Verena Tarrant, on the very eve of her great popular success as a lecturer in behalf of her oppressed but rising sex. By such a scheme James was naturally committed to making his elder feminists all out as unpleasant persons, preying on Verena's youth and charm and enthusiasm, and bound to keep her for their campaign no matter what it might cost her in the way of love and marriage. But more than James's own prejudices and his technical device contributes to a certain insufficiency in *The Bostonians.* It is too largely skeleton, without the blood which might have come from heartier sympathies, without the flesh with which James might have been able to round out a " purely American " tale had he not forgotten so much about American life. He had forgotten, or at least ceased to care greatly about it. Two visits to his native country during 1881–1883 had left him still hungry for Europe, from which after 1883 he was not to return for over twenty years.

The Princess Casamassima is wholly European as to setting and characters. In it the bewildering Christina Light of *Roderick Hudson,* now a discontented princess dabbling in revolution, appears again with a maturer mystery of temperament and an achieved diversity of whim. The romantic strain which James had lately been repressing here rose unashamed to the surface and invented a cock-and-bull yarn about a vast, malignant, ramifying

secret society which — not unlike that in Brockden Brown's *Ormond* so long before — was supposed to underlie the whole of modern Europe, ready at almost any moment to break out and set thrones and governments toppling. With the Princess is involved the pathetic Hyacinth Robinson, unacknowledged son of a lord and yet a book-binder by trade, who falls first into the vicious coils of the militant socialists, then into the kindly, though as it turns out no less fatal, coils of the Princess Casamassima, learns to admire the aristocracy, and comes to a tragic end. The story, James said, proceeded directly from his habit of walking the streets of London and reflecting upon the possible lot of some person who should have been produced by this civilization and yet should be condemned, as James decidedly had not been, to witness it from outside — that is, from outside the world of fashion and intelligence. Would not such a humble hero, if sensitive enough, long for all the privileges of such a civilization, plot against them when denied them, fall in love with them when invited to share them even transiently? *The Princess Casamassima* is James's answer to his question; it is, moreover, a superb *tour de force*. Although written as from some timid boudoir or club or milder hearth which trembles fantastically at devouring socialists, the book pleases by its variety and swiftness. It has, in the vulgar sense, a plot. And it is evidence, too, how thorough was the process of saturation going on in its author, that the background, splendid or sordid, of this novel is crowded with aspects of reality in the still life and racy yet believable characters to an extent that makes *The Bostonians* seem by comparison flat and empty.

If the international novels had shown the "dense categories of dark arcana" of European life threatened by Americans, and *The Princess Casamassima* by revolution, *The Tragic Muse* (1890) showed them threatened by art. Nicholas Dormer resigns his seat in Parliament to become a mere portrait painter, to the ineffable horror of his very political mother and fiancée and patron. Parallel to his career is that of Miriam Rooth, who without at first being a lady contrives to become, with the help of genius, a great actress, incidentally refusing, for the sake of her art, a rising diplomat who proposes to make her the most brilliant lady in Europe. The conflict between art and "the world" had early struck James as "one of the half-dozen great primary motives." That conflict had governed and shaped his own career. So far as he had been a partizan at all in his pictures of life he had sided with "the world" in its compacter, urbaner phases as against uncivilized crudity and cruelty. But now, standing at the center of the compact, urbane "world," he studied the phenomenon of genius which deflects Nick Dormer from all that his caste regards as desirable or even respectable; and which makes Miriam seem "important" as a human being in spite of her shortcomings as an ornament of society. That singular personage Gabriel Nash, who has no art but the art of living and who has no rôle in the novel but that of chorus, sums up the general problem. "It's the simplest thing in the world; just take for granted our right to be happy and brave. What's essentially kinder and more helpful than that, what's more beneficent? But the tradition of dreariness, of stodginess, of dull dense literal prose, has so sealed people's eyes

that they've ended by thinking the most natural of all things the most perverse." Such notes the æsthetic movement in England had been striking for a decade, but only Pater had struck them with the sustained power or linked sweetness of *The Tragic Muse*, and Pater had written about the long past instead of producing, as James here does, a marvelous document on the artistic life of his own immediate days. Peter Sherringham from watching Miriam arrives at a perception "of the perfect presence of mind, unconfused, unhurried by emotion, that any artistic performance requires and that all, whatever the instrument, require in exactly the same degree: the application, in other words, clear and calculated, crystal-firm as it were, of the idea conceived in the glow of experience, of suffering, of joy." Such a statement implies that James had found a new aristocracy to imagine about — an aristocracy essentially more cosmopolitan than the shining barbarians of his "perpetual Piccadilly" and his innumerable country houses.

This shift in the objects of his imagination was connected with certain external facts. The popular success which James had hardly tasted except in the case of *Daisy Miller* but which he had confidently expected would be won by *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*, had failed him. He felt hurt and mystified, for, contrary to the general notion, he desired more numerous plaudits than he got. He wanted money, though he had a competency; he wanted the power that comes from recognition. For these reasons more than any other he gave the five years of 1889–1894 very largely to the writing of plays, working enormously without any substantial reward, and finally

concluding early in 1895 that "you can't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse." The same period, and partly the same motive, turned him from full-length novels. "I want," he had written to Stevenson in 1888, "to leave a multitude of pictures of my time, projecting my small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible, . . . so that the number may constitute a total having a certain value as observation and testimony." Of these briefer stories a notably large number deal with problems of the artistic life in its clashes with "the world." *The Author of Beltraffio* (1885) had exhibited the wife of that pagan-spirited author as so afraid of her husband's influence upon their son that she actually — if not quite deliberately — lets the boy die to save him from the fearful contamination. *The Aspern Papers* (1888) recounts the strife between the former mistress of the famous Jeffrey Aspern and the critic who wants to publish the poet's letters. In *The Lesson of the Master* (1892) Henry St. George's lesson to his disciple is that perfection in art may not normally be hoped for by a man whose powers are drawn away by wife and children. To *The Yellow Book* James contributed three studies richly suited to the purposes of a periodical aiming to erect a temple of art in the midst of British Philistia: *The Death of the Lion* (1894), in which the genius Neil Paraday dies neglected in a country house while his hostess gets credit for being his patron; *The Coxon Fund* (1894), laughably modernizing Coleridge into the parasite Frank Saltram who sponges on the rich and devoted and foolish; *The Next Time* (1895), about poor Ralph Limbert who fails in his struggles to boil the pot because he is incapable of any-

thing less than masterpieces, no matter how hard he tries. This group of stories may be said to end with *The Figure in the Carpet* (1896), with Hugh Vereker explaining to his critics how it is they must look in the whole of a writer's work for the "primal plan," the string his pearls are strung on, the complex figure in the Persian carpet of his art. "If my great affair's a secret," said Vereker, "that's only because it's a secret in spite of itself. . . . I not only never took the smallest precaution to make it so, but never dreamed of any such accident." So Henry James might have reasoned in his own behalf. Obscurity was his destiny not his design. He had set out to record certain subtle relationships that he perceived binding men and women together in the human picture, and he would not call it his fault if his perceptions had proved more delicate than those of the reading public. He had tried to make national contrasts interesting; he had tried to diversify his matter in the great novels of the eighties; he had tried a new literary form in his plays and had, restricting himself for a time as to dimensions, written about the artistic life as no one had ever done in English. Nothing had availed him with the wider audience. He now gave up the battle, reconciled himself to his limited fate, discovered the house at Rye which was to be his permanent residence till the end of his life, and settled down to the untrammeled practice of his art.

Nothing could be more autobiographical, in a sense, than this later work of Henry James, exquisitely reproducing as it so often does the adventures of exquisite souls among thorns and pitfalls. To robuster dispositions he appears, of course, to be making an incredible

fuss over nothing to speak of, and he did cease to interest any but that small group capable of caring about passions so delicate as these. But art may be great without being popular, just as now and then some magnificent radiance of personality may light up a narrow corner. A flawless story published in 1895, *The Altar of the Dead*, somewhat forecasts James's final type. It is the tale — almost an apologue — of a George Stransom who at an altar privately maintained in a dim church sets up, one after another, candles for his dead, himself gradually perfected by his worship until at last he can complete the symmetry of his ritual by setting up a final candle to the memory of his bitter enemy, now forgiven. This narrow corner of existence glows with the whitest, purest light of a noble imagination. James's themes, however, rarely rose quite so high. He chose to walk closer to the ground of usual events, expanding and elevating not the deeds of his characters but their sentiments. In *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) the action is only a sordid squabble between a widow and her son over the possession of a house made beautiful with objects of art which she has collected there for a lifetime but which by the hard English law now belong not to her but to him and the stupid bride he means to take. Round this central strife the story grew from a tale to a novel, from a vivid episode to a drama richly conceived and decorated. Another novelist might have abused the law; some other might have sided with son or mother. Henry James reveals his drama through a third person, the gentle, unselfish Fleda Vetch, who shares the mother's passion for beautiful things but who loves the son. James lacked the moral arithmetic

which taught Howells in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* that wisdom demands the strictest economy in sacrifice: Fleda Vetch, though Owen Gereth loves her and not Mona Brigstock, renounces him without lifting a hand, and condemns, along with herself, son and mother and doubtless wife to pain — and all seemingly with James's approbation. But though in this regard sentimental and immoral, *The Spoils of Poynton* as regards structure, proportion, texture, style, is accomplished perfection, the result of methods now matured and working upon their materials with absolute competence, without sign of effort or haste.

It was natural that in imagining the world in its impact upon tender intelligences, Henry James should have made use of children as his focuses of sensation. *What Maisie Knew* (1897) records the disgusting annals of a "fast" set in London through the mystified innocence of Maisie Farange, whose father and mother, divorced and both married again, toss her back and forth from one to the other in the intervals of incessant infidelity. She sees the outer facts of these obscene menages — joined together, by the way, through the liaison of the step-parents — without comprehending their inner horror. She is like a flower blooming in a filthy pool, by her shy beauty making the contrast a dreadful thing. That contrast is the plot. Charming though Maisie appears in her own right, and ugly as her companions are in theirs, the interest lies essentially in the relations between them and her. The spectator, aware that in time her innocence will sink down and the dirty flood overwhelm her, constantly winces. Still worse horrors, however, threaten in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), an almost incomparable short story which,

as a sort of moral sequel to *What Maisie Knew*, exhibits two children so corrupted by wicked servants that words will not utter the evil in them. Although a certain symbolism hints at the nature of this particular evil, James was careful not to identify it exactly. Horror multiplies with the vagueness. Maisie is menaced by a bad example which is understood however hated; Miles and Flora appear to have been exposed to dim cosmic forces of evil which surround mankind as in the old Puritan cosmos, now and then expressed in actual sin but always huger than anything which can come of them. *The Awkward Age* (1899), also concerned with the young, brought James back from his far explorations to polite comedy again, to the problem of the young girl in a society full of innuendo and intrigue. But Nanda Brookenham's experiences are swathed in such countless folds of reference and gossip that, artfully as the drama is expounded, it comes to the ear with a muffled sound, like agreeable voices heard speaking at a distance which lets the actual words die away on the wind. Five hundred pages of such matter strain the most loyal attention to irritation if not to disgust. And much the same thing must be said of *The Sacred Fount* (1901), which has a soul the size of a short story and a body enlarged to the size of a novel by the solicitude with which James walks round and round his theme, hinting, hinting, hinting.

A consequence of the exuberant insinuation with which he worked in the first five years of his freedom from hope in the public was that the public found itself, by the reports of those who had read these later books, confirmed in its disposition to neglect him. From these years dates

the legend that he had consciously, almost spitefully, evolved a style which no one could read but which it was a jolly game to laugh at. The laughter grew into a cloud which obscured, and still in most quarters continues to obscure, the three superb novels with which, in prolific succession, he brought his art to its peak: *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904). As if with some recurrence of his younger interests, he deals in each of the three with the old situation of Americans in Europe, but in a spirit no longer so reproachful toward them as being merely provincial or dowdy. James had ceased to be worried over the petty blunders of his traveling countrymen, now that he felt himself securely European and no longer felt the responsibility which once had brought compatriotic blushes to his cheek. Like Mr. Longdon in *The Awkward Age*, an elderly Englishman who has retired to the country but is now drawn back to London again, James's Americans in his maturest masterpieces bring into a fast and loose society certain old-fashioned virtues and graces, such as simplicity, truthfulness, monogamy, solvency. Even Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors*, who, having gone from "Woollett Massachusetts" to save a young friend from the naughtinesses of Paris, himself surrenders to the beautifully beguiling universe he has entered — even Strether holds fast to the integrity which has all along given strength to his natural sympathy and which will not allow him to profit by his amiable betrayal of his mission. Strether's being an American who can be contrasted with Europeans, however, does not exhaust his function. He stands also for a common enough human

type, the individual brought up in a limited community who discovers too late, or almost too late, what richness, what content, what joy might have awaited him in some fuller existence. "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to," Strether says in a speech which Henry James himself pointed out to be the essence of *The Ambassadors*. "It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had?" With some such precepts Pater had talked of the counted number of pulse-beats and had counseled a life lived at the flame. And in that transcendentalist New England which James partially inherited, Emerson and Thoreau had constantly urged the need of fullness and intensity of life. Strether's situation flawlessly fits James's idea. To get the largest value from them James had of course to make Strether another of his exquisite intelligences — rather too exquisite for his upbringing; he had, too, to make this abundant life into which Strether is initiated a life of lovely line and color, of gorgeous vesture and sweet, subtle, intoxicating atmosphere. All James's old powers came in upon him, with his new freedom. The execution of *The Ambassadors*, which he thought his most perfectly constructed novel, is as richly imaginative as it is deliberate.

James had annually increased the distance between his art and improvisation. He built novels now as architects do cathedrals, planning every stone in advance, testing every material, calculating every stress, visualizing every "elevation." Without any impetuous drive of narrative to carry him on, or the clashes of melodrama, he peculiarly needed anxious prevision and conscientious workmanship.

The Golden Bowl excellently illustrates this. Maggie Verver, an American girl, marries an Italian prince living in London, and her widowed father marries her friend Charlotte Stant. But there had been between Charlotte and the Prince before their marriages a secret intimacy which afterwards is resumed. With the fictive paraphernalia customary to such cases — jealousy, peeping, revelations, revenges — James of course has nothing to do. He would no more have brought the matter into the courts than would Maggie Verver and her quiet father. For James, as for Maggie, the evil of the situation consisted less in the sin of adultery than in the ugliness of stealth and deceit. The problem is to bring the hidden offense into light, and the plot is merely the process by which the various characters, one after another, first only gradually, accidentally, then with suspicions hurrying dreadfully into convictions, discover and are discovered. When the truth has come up into the light, the story ends, with Verver and his wife departing for America. Tenuous as the substance may seem to any first glance, *The Golden Bowl* is still solidly constructed beneath its sumptuous garment of phrases and clauses; careless of moral considerations as it may seem to any moralistic eye, it still glows with condemnation of the ugly and the sordid facts which here disrupt a charming microcosm. The story suggests the coming of a great summer sun after a midnight of slinking ghosts.

In *The Wings of the Dove* the beauty and power of truth and goodness receive a tribute which has rarely been paid them in sophisticated novels. As Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* has risen magnificently to meet life,

so here Milly Theale magnificently rises to meet death. The book is the drama of her "inspired resistance." Without gross or overt agonies, she struggles to experience "as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived." James made her a New Yorker, the last of her family, rich and free, as the best way he could imagine to endow her with all the ages, and he took her of course to Europe to inherit her domain. There her battle and collapse, since she moves through her fate like a reigning princess, draw a whole circle with and after her; and in the end her tragedy shakes them all. The particular blackness against which she is exhibited is the scheme of Kate Croy and her lover Merton Densher to make Milly believe he is in love with her in order that before her death she may leave him her fortune. Yet so radiant is the whiteness of Milly's character that, though the plot superficially succeeds, the plotters are separated by disgust at their own shame. Every dexterity was required in such a story to keep Milly from seeming a prig or at best a tedious saint. James avoids this fatal defect by revealing her not so much in her words and deeds as in the effect she has on those who devotedly or selfishly surround her. She stands, as it were, in the midst of a splendid hall of mirrors, which give back her beauty from every angle and which themselves report her quest of a crowded existence during her numbered days. As she slowly fades under her malady the mirrors have an increasing task, until at last she is no longer visible except in them, where eventually her image lingers even after her death. Such puissance as hers does not lapse with bodily extinction,

but lasts on as a remembered effluence of loveliness. If *The Ambassadors* is the best constructed of these three novels, and *The Golden Bowl* the most subtly suggestive, *The Wings of the Dove* is most elevated, most tender, most noble.

They issued from what might be called the Indian summer of James's career as an American. "Europe," he wrote in 1902, "has ceased to be romantic to me, and my own country, in the evening of my days, has become so." But his longing did not survive the visit which he lustrously chronicled in *The American Scene* (1907). From New Hampshire to Florida, from New York to California, the sensations awakened by the roaring continent overwhelmed him. Like an astronomer come down from his tower into the town, James fled back with his hands to his ears. The remainder of his life was more fragmentary than the rounded period 1896–1904. He resumed for a little while his theatrical ambitions; he wrote more short stories; he worked at the two novels, *The Sense of the Past* (originally begun in 1900) and *The Ivory Tower*, which, though incomplete when posthumously published in 1917, have the special interest that the second of them employs the American scene and both are accompanied by the dictated notes which he latterly made to assist him in his composition; and he carried avowed autobiography through *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), and the unfinished *The Middle Years* (1917). The war shattered his peace beyond repair. This lover of art who had not taken the trouble to form an opinion concerning the Dreyfus case, who had little more to say of the Boer War than that it doubled his income tax, who

had vaguely hoped that the war with Spain might educate Americans as imperialism had educated the English, who had looked with candid contempt upon the Irish aspirations for freedom, now woke to the crisis of the world with a passion which ceased only with his death in 1916. There was nothing complicated in his loyalty, nothing critical in his attitude toward the drama being enacted. His " Europe " — France, England, Italy — had been assailed in utter wantonness; the barbarians were pounding at the gates and might at any moment break in to befoul the pavements and violate the shrines of his sacred city. His own distant country looked on without lifting a helping hand, and he saw no better way to signify his protest and his allegiance than by becoming a British citizen in 1915, declaring " civis Britannicus sum " with a Roman boast, and ending his career, as he had begun it, on the note of romance.

Criticism must take account of the vast gulf across which those who like Henry James view with contempt those who do not, and in return those who do not like him view with incredulity those who do. Casual gossip says that his style by its obscurity has fixed the gulf there. While this indubitably operates with regard to certain of his later works, it can have nothing to do with *The American*, or *The Europeans*, or *Daisy Miller*, or *Washington Square*, or *The Portrait of a Lady*, which are all as pellucid as a clean spring. And even in the elaborate, maturer books the style is obscure only in the sense that it speaks of matters less blunt and tangible than those which most fiction deals with. Nor will the cosmopolitan aspect of his themes entirely explain the

hindering gulf, as has been argued by patriots who wish to punish him for his expatriation. The three metropolises — New York, London, Paris — which mark the triangle of his chosen territory are objects of curiosity for an enormous audience. Indeed, nationalism hurts James worse than internationalism: he suffers from the sensitiveness to national differences which kept him concerned too much with them and too little with the universal human likenesses which transcend nationality. He was actually less able to forget his American origin than such an unhesitant son of America as Whitman, for instance, who, taking his native land for granted, could send his imaginations out to all the corners of the world without worrying at the national boundaries thus crossed. Neither may James's failure to touch the wider world he really aimed at be accounted for by his unceasing labors to perfect his technique of representation. These concerned himself alone, or such fellow craftsman or connoisseurs as find in his prefaces to the New York Edition (1907–09) the most remarkable commentaries ever made upon the art of fiction.

James's essential limitation may rather accurately be expressed by saying that he attempted, in a democratic age, to write courtly romances. He did not, naturally, go back for his models to the *Roman de la Rose* or *Morte d'Arthur* or Sidney's *Arcadia* or the *Grand Cyrus*. But he did devote himself to those classes in modern society which descend from the classes represented by the romancers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. His characters, for the most part, neither toil nor spin, trade nor make war, bear children in pain nor bring them up with sacrifices. The characters who do such things in his

novels are likely to be the servants or dependents of others more comfortably established. His books consequently lack the interest of that fiction which shows men and women making some kind of way in the world — except the interest which can be taken in the arts by which the penniless creep into the golden favor of the rich or the socially unarrived wriggle into an envied caste. James is the laureate of leisure. Moreover the leisure he cared to write about concerns itself in not the slightest degree with any action whatsoever, even games or sports. Love of course concerns it, as with all novelists. Yet even love in this chosen universe must constantly run the gauntlet of a decorum incomprehensible to all but the initiate. Decorum is what damns James with the public. In one of Chrétien de Troyes's romances Lancelot, on his way to rescue Guinevere from a most precarious situation, commits the blunder of riding part of the way in a cart and thereby brings upon himself a disgrace which his most gallant deeds can scarcely wipe out. Sensible citizens who may have happened upon this narrative in the twelfth century probably felt mystified at the pother much as do their congeners in the twentieth who stare at the wounds which James's heroes and heroines suffer from blunders intrinsically no more serious than Lancelot's. How much leisure these persons must enjoy, the sensible citizen thinks, to have evolved and to keep up this mandarin formality; and how little use they make of it! Only readers accustomed to such decorums can walk entirely at ease in the universe James constructed. But they have the privileges of a domain unprecedented and unmatched in modern literature. It is not merely that he is the most fascinating

historian of the most elegant society of the century. He is the creator of a world immensely beautiful in its own right: a world of international proportions, peopled by charming human beings who live graceful lives in settings lovely almost beyond description; a world which vibrates with the finest instincts and sentiments and trembles at vulgarity and ugliness; a world full of works of art and learning and intelligence, a world infinitely refined, a world perfectly civilized. In real life the danger to such a world is that it may be overwhelmed by some burly rush of actuality from without. In literature the danger is that such a world will gradually fade out as dreams fade, and as the old romances of feudalism have already faded. Elaborate systems of decorum pass away; it is only the simpler manners of men which live forever.

CHAPTER IX

THE EIGHTIES AND THEIR KIN

1. Varied Types

The decade 1880–1890 produced more good novels than any other American decade. Howells was then at his height in *A Modern Instance*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *Indian Summer*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes;* Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court;* Henry James in *Washington Square*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Tragic Muse.* It was the decade which saw the beginnings and the most brilliant successes of Francis Marion Crawford, the story-teller par excellence among American novelists, and Frank R. Stockton, delightful inventor of joyous extravaganza. It was the decade of Wallace's *Ben-Hur*, of Cable's *The Grandissimes*, of E. W. Howe's *The Story of a Country Town*, of Blanche Willis Howard's *Guenn*, of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, of Henry Adams's *Democracy* and John Hay's *The Bread-Winners*, of Constance Fenimore Woolson's *East Angels*, of Margaret Deland's *John Ward, Preacher*, of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward.* In spite of the popularity of the short story, the novel prospered. The publication of novels serially in magazines had not yet begun to decline. Criticism of the art attained a high dignity in

the hands of Howells and Henry James; Bayard Tuckerman wrote *A History of English Prose Fiction* (1882) which included American authors; and Sidney Lanier used his lectures on *The English Novel* (1883) as the vehicle for a load of passionate opinions concerning literature. By the eighties practically all the types of fiction known to the United States had been invented and all of them were in use. Domestic sentimentalism of course still walked its everlasting way of tears with an abundant audience. The romance of adventure, though degraded to the dime novel for the most part, asked no quarter from the critical. The historical tale kept up its ancient habits with the past, sweetening and decorating it. The international novel, sometimes rather the exotic romance, was having its day, not only in Howells and James but in various followers. Local color, tending toward the romantic, divided the principal field with realism, tending away from it. The novel with some sort of purpose continued to be a tool ready to almost every hand. And there were also certain gaily whimsical stories of a sort new to the country if not to the language.

The novels of the eighties cannot be reduced to any such simple formulas as suffice with the romance of Cooper's school or with the tearful tales of the fifties. They show diversities of style and structure, of artistic and moral attitude, as well as topographical variety. In general they represent a decisive advance in simplicity and reality. Characters were now no longer required to speak the stilted language or to feel the quivering sentiments that had once seemed symptoms of nobility of soul. At the same time, but little advance had been made in the

direction of studied raciness or strenuous naturalism. Howells's honest decency set the tone for the period. As the master was often saved from seeming thin and tame only by his unfailing grace and mellow wisdom, the disciples, inferior in these respects, did not always escape thinness or tameness. The preoccupation with local color encouraged love of surfaces, if not a satisfaction with surfaces alone; so that, though the local color novel was likely to be a more serious performance than the short story of the type, it nevertheless suffered from the contagion of triviality. The fiction of the eighties suffered, too, from the delicate contagion of gentility. At the best it imparted daintiness and charm; at the worst, timidity and bloodlessness. The violent currents of political life during the decade, which brought a new party into power for the first time in a quarter of a century; the rising warfare upon established economic privilege; the rapid growth in luxury and sophistication — these but faintly appear in the novels which the decade brought forth, except for those specifically designed to redress grievances or to expose wrongs. Ordinarily, ideas played but a small part. Nor was this absence of ideas compensated for, again except in special cases, by large ranges of personality or depths of passion or impressive beauty or truth. The lives which these novels represent have little to do with the clash of the times in religious or moral, any more than in political, matters. Even in the love affairs which make up the great bulk of all such narratives the complications are of the simplest and the psychology simpler still. The very young do most of the loving, innocently, pathetically, hardly ever realistically or

tragically. If love is simple, so is livelihood. While many of the novels do indeed concern themselves with the poor, it is the more or less contented poor of the older American villages where no serious poverty existed. In but few cases do the heroes and heroines of the eighties contend with the society in which they live, and then rarely indeed with the approval of their authors. Fiction, in short, had not assumed the heavier burdens laid on it by a subsequent generation, but existed largely for entertainment.

If it was thus limited in certain directions, so was it freed in others. It recognized no obligation to be polemic, though it could be so on occasion. It did not look relentlessly for victims of the social order who might be elevated into champions of a higher truth. It did not feel obliged to take many exceptions to the broad average current of human existence. It chose the simpler emotions for the reason that American character was simple. It preferred to make as much of the cheerful aspects of life as possible, because that was the general American preference, even when there was much unpleasantness to be blinked at. With such a temper prevalent, the style of fiction naturally became lighter and gayer. It discarded the blocks of description which the older romances had admitted and the showers of tears which had immediately preceded the Civil War. Having taken stock of technical methods, it varied its structures with its themes, gave an increased attention to dialect and dialogue, studied the problems of proportion and emphasis. The decade made a highly eclectic use of foreign models. Lanier devoted nearly a half of his study of the English novel to George

Eliot, who was influential in many quarters. The writers of local color novels in not a few instances showed traces of Thomas Hardy. *Ben-Hur* recalls both Bulwer-Lytton and Victor Hugo. Aldrich and Cable and Bunner had obviously read such Frenchmen as Merimée, About, Daudet, Maupassant, though with reservations. Toward the end of the decade Zola began to be heard, particularly railed at, however, by the orthodox. Henry James and Howells investigated and expounded Turgenev; James added most of the French novelists of the time; Howells added Dostoevsky and his master passion Tolstoy, as well as the Spanish Galdós, Valdés, Valera, and the Italian Verga; while both Howells and James had something to say of almost every eminent European who practised fiction. Though eclectic, the American novel was not unwarrantably imitative. It had certain traditions of its own and followed them. It was faithful to American life, at least to those phases which it chose to record. Its points of view were clearly national. Without achieving methods as distinctive as those of the short story, the American novel was still a distinctively, unmistakably native product.

In the department of domestic sentimentalism the most widely read rivals of E. P. Roe and his kind who appeared in the eighties happened both to be Lancashire women resident in America: Frances Hodgson Burnett, whose *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) moistened millions of uncritical eyes with its account of the American child instructing the British aristocracy in democratic manners; and Amelia Edith Barr, whose swift, kindly pen played over all the fields of fiction except the distinguished. In

the romance of adventure Anna Katharine Green Rohlfs made something of a new departure with her very successful detective stories, and Captain (later General) Charles King became the first novelist of the American army, with his brisk stories of field and camp and military post. The historical novel, for which Howells and James cared so little, suffered some neglect, though *Ben-Hur* belonged to that form and *A Connecticut Yankee* burlesqued it; John Esten Cooke worked in it till his death in 1886; Marion Crawford handled past and present with almost equal ease; and at the end of the decade several writers began to point forward to the historical-romantic "best sellers" which crowded the nineties. The older fashion of sea tales and foreign adventure, now fallen into abeyance, had been succeeded by the milder comedy of international manners, as handled by Howells and James. Mark Twain, of course, handled it humorously, and Crawford, when he liked, with vigorous knowledge. A tragic note infrequent in these international comedies was struck by Blanche Willis Howard's *Guenn* (1884), the story of an American painter in a Breton village and the hopeless, fatal love which he awakens in a young girl there. Most such novels represented their Americans as a little bewildered by the superior complexity of European manners; to Guenn, wild and simple, Hamor seems rich and strange and great. The story, founded, it is said, on the actual experience of a painter who is still living, charmingly preserves the spirit of a day when American artists were mad with the love of France and swarmed over it in pursuit of the beauty and quaintness which at the moment seemed to reside there as nowhere else.

Novels of foreign life might have flourished more numerously had it not been for the zest with which the rarer materials of existence were pursued at home. Better though the local color writers were in short stories than in novels, their longer novels cannot be overlooked. Bret Harte, in such attempts as *The Story of a Mine* (1878), *Maruja* (1885), *Cressy* (1889), *A Waif of the Plains* (1890), as in other brief novels like them, did no more than to expand short stories with a loss of effectiveness in proportion as he expanded them. And *Gabriel Conroy* (1876), a long novel, for all the novelty and even riches of its contrasts of California civilizations, is lamentably deficient as regards conception, structure, and suspense. With certain touches here and there of Harte's romantic charm or insinuating irony, it is for the most part mere melodrama, without even the distinction of being swift or thrilling as melodrama should be. The contrast of Californian civilizations led Helen Hunt Jackson to write one of the most moving of American romances. In *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) she had begun her indictment of the United States government for its treatment of the Indians. In *Ramona* (1884) she carried the indictment further, bringing her passion to bear in a new guise. What *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had done to make known the wrongs of the black slaves, *Ramona* attempted to do for the red wards of the nation. It was no longer possible to take Fenimore Cooper's attitude toward the Indian as a lofty child of nature; since Cooper's day there had been the wars with the Sioux and the massacre of Custer. Mrs. Jackson eluded the difficulty by making Ramona, the heroine, and her Temecula husband Alessandro so near

to high caste Mexicans in color and nurture that their wrongs as Indians seem hardly typical of the real grievances of their unfortunate race. They suffer little more from the invading Yankees than do the proudest Mexicans. Indeed, the true conflict and injustice occur between the old Californians, Indian or Spanish, and the predacious vanguard of the Anglo-Saxon conquest. For Mrs. Jackson California had been a splendid paradise of patriarchal estates, in vast fertile valleys, steeped in a drowsy antiquity, and cherished by fine, unworldly priests. Against this rich background she set a story which begins in peace, blackens to hard and ugly tragedy, and then grows at the end to peace again. The pomp of the setting, the strength of the contrasts, the eloquence, the intensity, the passionate color — these dominate, almost submerge, the problem with which the narrative is concerned; but they also tend to lift it above controversy, into those higher regions of the imagination in which particular acts of injustice take on a universal significance, in which blunders become tragedies not temporary accidents.

Ramona was a local color novel which had a passionate aim and a large historical background as well as quaint surfaces. Two novels of the Mississippi Valley, G. W. Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880) and E. W. Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* (1883), illustrate the range which the type permitted. *The Grandissimes* is to New Orleans what Irving's Knickerbocker *History* might have been to New York had Irving given himself less to comic history and more to witty romance. For his period Cable chose the year of the purchase of Louisiana by the United States, but the entire history of the old province

lies behind his narrative, constantly showing through; for his scene he chose New Orleans, but action shifts, at least by report, to plantation and bayou, forest and swamp. No other American novel represents such a mingling of races: French and Spanish and German and Yankee, Creole and quadroon, Indian aborigines, and negro slaves who speak a strange jargon of French and English but who have the instincts of Africa in their blood. This New Orleans is a city of austere castes and almost incomprehensible customs, never too obviously explained, though hinted at with laughing dexterity. The central plot, which shows the houses of Grandissime and De Grapion at war and then reconciles and unites them by marriage, loses itself, unfortunately, in a maze of episodes. But the episodes glitter under a treatment and a style to the last degree allusive, sparkling, felicitous. By comparison, *The Story of a Country Town* moves with the cold tread and hard diction of a saga. It has, indeed, various romantic elements: there is a mill in a dark wood; the church bell tolls fitfully in high winds; certain of the characters prowl about ominously midnight after midnight. The author, whose first book this was, apparently did not know how to give it the sense of locality. It is as if the bare, sunburned Kansas plain, on which the action passes, had no real depth, no mystery in itself, no native motif but the smoldering discontent of an inarticulate frontier. If it lacks locality, so does it lack relief, comedy, poetical touches, and above all that flowing optimism which too often weakened the books of the period. *The Story of a Country Town* is the sternest, the grimmest of American novels — and it was published the same year as Mark

Twain's joyous *Life on the Mississippi*. If happiness or gaiety ever lighted up Fairview and Twin Mounds Howe's story does not tell it. There is something symbolic about the figure of the narrator's father, the Rev. John Westlock, who outwardly practises the most ferocious Calvinism and yet is daily haunted by gorgeous processions of sin sweeping before his eyes, until he runs off with a vulgar woman to an existence more miserable than the first. Symbolic, too, is Lytle Biggs, who serves as impudent chorus with a cynicism that plays over the face of the story, cheapening and corroding all it touches. Howe wrote about Twin Mounds as Crabbe wrote about the English village — determined, it seems, to paint it "As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not": a neighborhood as barren of beauty and elevation as of lakes and mountains; dogmatic without being religious, ambitious enough without having any intelligent aims, industrious but futile. A Parisian never wrote more contemptuously of provincial life. And yet beneath this cold exterior, which will not let the narrative or the dialogue be flexible for one moment, lurks authentic power. No shallow mind could have conceived the blind, black, impossible passion of Joe Erring, who loves like a backwoods Othello; no tepid mind could have conducted such a passion through its catastrophe to the purgation and tranquillity which succeed. That Howe, though he wrote another novel or two, ended his career as a novelist almost where he began it, meant a grave loss to American fiction. He made himself a successful country journalist, a wise and ineffably disillusioned country sage; but the energy of his imagination sought other channels than the novel.

Howe had taken a step beyond Edward Eggleston on the way to that stiffening of the conscience which brought the naturalism of the next decade, but in the eighties he had no fellow except Joseph Kirkland of Illinois, who wrote the crude, truthful *Zury* (1887). Elsewhere local color produced few novels that need to be called by name. Cable wrote others for Louisiana; Charles Egbert Craddock now and then turned away from the short story with her Tennessee material; as did Sarah Orne Jewett in New England, H. C. Bunner in New York, and Richard Malcolm Johnston in Georgia. An unusual control over a diversity of sections appears in the work of Constance Fenimore Woolson, a grandniece of Fenimore Cooper, who during the eighties had a promise that seemed to rank her little below Howells and James and Crawford. She lived in turn in the Great Lakes region, particularly Mackinac, in the devastated, reviving South of Reconstruction times, and in Italy, applying her art to all of her neighborhoods. Henry James found her deserving of a fairly extended critique from a pen which did not often condescend to the underwoods of literature. Her stories are perhaps as good as her novels, but she has not quite survived by virtue of either. And yet *East Angels* (1886), that glowing, rich-hued picture of the Florida of the tourist, just misses being a classic. To be mistress of all the local colors will not make a writer even a minor classic unless something else is added — some superior grace as in Cable or superior veracity as in E. W. Howe.

Little as most of the novels of the period touched upon its public affairs, some of them were not silent. Albion Winegar Tourgée's *A Fool's Errand* (1879) called atten-

tion to the problem of the freedman. Henry Adams in *Democracy* (1880) drew a caustic picture of society and politics in Washington — a city strangely neglected in American literature, which can hardly point to a dozen political novels of any merit whatever. John Hay's *The Bread-Winners* (1884) made a sensation by its defense of the old economic order against the increasing claims of labor. Margaret Deland's *John Ward, Preacher* (1888), like the exactly contemporary *Robert Elsmere* of Mrs. Humphry Ward, aroused wide controversy by its account of a husband and wife so divided on doctrinal grounds that their lives are shattered. In the American novel it is the husband who is orthodox and the wife who is latitudinarian, but here as in the English book stress falls upon the consequences to love of such a difference. Though no civilized human being can now do more than stare at the zeal which impels John Ward in his efforts to save his wife's soul by teaching her to believe in the fires of hell, by no means all the passion of the book has faded out. In the same year with *John Ward* appeared a work of fiction which caught the immediate public as hardly any book of its theme had ever done before. The book was Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, and the theme was communism. Hundreds of thousands of copies were sold with a tumult of acclamation; the book went round the world; a political party — the Nationalist party — was founded on Bellamy's doctrines. Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and his Altrurian writings bear witness to the influence Bellamy exerted in literary circles. Reversing the scheme of *The Connecticut Yankee* Bellamy allows his narrator to sleep until the year

2000 and then to wake upon a Utopian Boston which, like the rest of the world, has moved forward, without revolution, to a rational adjustment of production and distribution, and has perfected the conditions of human life. In his glad millennium all capital belongs to the community and all labor contributes to it; the inequality of reward has disappeared, for men and women all share alike, however different may be the tasks to which they are assigned by the most careful selection; intelligent planning has increased the wealth of the community, wealth has increased leisure, and leisure has increased joy and goodness. Bellamy's specific solutions of the ancient problem matter less to the history of American fiction than the fact that he found an enormous public ready to snatch from his romance some sort of consolation in a vast discontent.

At the opposite pole from Bellamy was Frank R. Stockton (1834–1902), in whom whimsy reached something like its apogee. Stockton, a Philadelphian, first worked at wood-engraving but deserted it for literature, which he reached by the unusual avenue of fairy tales and juvenile journalism. As in his fairy tales he had made his fanciful creatures behave, as far as possible, after the manner of the real world, so into his maturer stories of the real world he constantly infused a fairy irresponsibility. His earliest important book, *Rudder Grange* (1879), illustrates all his qualities. The suggestion came from an actual maid in Stockton's household, whom he called Pomona both in fact and in fiction, and around whose preposterous deeds and words and tastes he built up a little cycle of improbabilities. Pomona, after a youth largely devoted to the kind of literature that entranced Tom

Sawyer, marries a farmer who has ague at the altar; spends her honeymoon partly in a lunatic asylum as guest not inmate; and later has a child which so much occupies her mistress that the master of the house hires another child to amuse himself with. The household which Pomona adorns is joyfully mad. Part of the time it inhabits a canal boat. Later it lets its house so that master and mistress can have the fun of tenting on the estate, though after a little they become bored and take refuge in their own house, which is that same day deserted by the pair which has leased it but now prefers to live in the tent, which they have discovered without knowing to whom it belongs. Still later the Rudder Grangers find a deserted tavern in which they take immense delight, disturbed only by travelers who insist on being entertained there. To the outward eye the novel resembles realism. The characters look real, they speak like beings who are real enough. But their adventures are the adventures of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera — one rollicking confusion which, so popular did it prove, had later to be continued in *The Rudder Grangers Abroad* (1891) and *Pomona's Travels* (1894).

Stockton's fancy found the short story peculiarly congenial, and the dilemma he invented for his brief tale *The Lady or the Tiger?* (1882) won him his largest single applause. On the whole, however, his masterpiece was *The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine* (1886), which also had a sequel, *The Dusantes* (1888). The dauntless Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine come, like Pomona, from reality, from two middle-aged women who knew too little of the world outside of their village ever

to be surprised at anything which could possibly happen to them elsewhere. To them in the story it happens that they are wrecked in the Pacific Ocean, paddle themselves in life-preservers, using oars as brooms, to an island which might have been deserted but which instead has a comfortable house on it, and there begin housekeeping as cheerfully as if they were in Meadowville, scrupulously depositing each week in a ginger jar on the mantelpiece a sum for board, minus a fair charge for their services in doing the housework. After a train of incidents which joyfully, though not too obviously, parody all the literature of shipwreck, they are restored to the United States; but they have left behind them a letter which so piques the curiosity of the real owners, the Dusantes, that those migratory personages follow Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine and their companions to the United States, especially to return the money which Mr. Dusante is far too hospitable to be willing to keep. Mr. Dusante, who has an adopted mother with him, encounters in Mrs. Lecks a moral principle equal to his own and finds she will not take back the money; the sequel is largely devoted to the fate of the ginger jar. If Stockton's fantastic invention is here at its most luxuriant, so is his manner at its gravest. His tongue is only stealthily in his cheek, and his voice is as calm and level as if he were reciting the multiplication table. Thus inspired liars lie — sailors back from distant voyages and yarning to landlubbers, cowboys "stringing" tenderfeet with tales of local dangers, Sindbads and Munchausens.

Stockton dictated his stories lying comfortably in a hammock in summer and in an easy chair in colder weather.

His delight in circumstantial mendacity was so unfailing that he often spun his matter out too thin, and he never concerned himself with the problem of structure beyond what he needed to give point to an episode. His variety came largely from within. At the same time, he was observant of costume and dialect. He amused himself particularly with the negroes and certain odd whites whom he encountered in the South (Virginia was latterly his home) and who make *The Late Mrs. Null* (1886) a continual delight. In New Jersey, where he spent much of his life within surburban distance of New York, he constantly studied the village types, and above all the sailors along the coast, whose habits with regard to the sober truth fell in admirably with his own. Stockton's mariners are among his happiest devices. They furnish a natural excuse for fibbing, and they themselves, rakish and tarry, give comic opera touches which nothing else in Stockton quite equals. The three seamen who in *The Dusantes* tattoo the barn and set out onions according to nautical designs may be said to head the humorous crew, but they have many rivals for preëminence. Stockton's invention rarely flagged. *The Adventures of Captain Horn* (1895) plays with the search for hidden treasure in South America: its sequel, *Mrs. Cliff's Yacht* (1896), goes larking among pirates, who interested Stockton in other books as well. He cheerfully perlustrated the strangest climes and ages, with a blithe inconsequence heaping all his visions together, as if he were some jovial Spenser taking a vacation in Fairyland. He delighted, too, in imaginary science, like that which in *The Great Stone of Sardis* (1898) proves that the center of the earth is one immense

crystal, and in imaginary machines such as those for making war prohibitive in *The Great War Syndicate* (1889). In such directions he carried his fooling to an extravagance and a tenuity which have punished him with inpermanence, the fate, indeed, of most lighter comedy. But in his three or four genuine successes he achieved more with merry farce than any other American novelist. Stockton should have credit, too, for his services in rendering popular the briefer type of novel called in America the novelette, the vogue of which was established during the eighties and early nineties.

With Stockton may be mentioned Eugene Field, much better known for his verse and his comic skits than for his fiction, and yet the author of at least one novel — if it may be called a novel — which has achieved among book-lovers a little immortality. *The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac* (1896) chronicles no passions more violent than the desire for books, but it chronicles that desire in forms as diversified as Field's own career as a collector, and in a tone as piquant and whimsical as that of his own personality. The tale is packed with charming episodes and vagaries recognizable by all the book-hunting tribe; indeed, it exhibits, in an unpretentious way, an unusual erudition playing over the amiable regions of literature which Field himself had explored. But the bibliomaniac of the narrative, though largely studied from Field's own tastes, is also an actual creation, extended, if not enlarged, from the life by the addition of adventures which every book-collector has imagined himself as having, and portrayed with the sprightly humor and wistful grace which Field generally reserved for his verse. Something like the same

quaint or homely touches may be found in two other novels of the period which both exploit elderly, eccentric, charming heroes: F. Hopkinson Smith's *Colonel Carter of Cartersville* (1891), displaying the type of old school Virginia gentleman now firmly fixed in the popular imagination; and Edward Noyes Westcott's *David Harum* (1898), a novel dominated by a shrewd, racy-tongued upstate New Yorker who holds a comfortable place in the long American tradition of the unlettered philosopher and humorist.

2. Francis Marion Crawford

In the eighties began the career of that later American writer who gave to the novel his most complete allegiance, undeflected by the vogue of briefer narratives, which he only barely attempted, or by other forms of imaginative literature. Francis Marion Crawford, descendant of the Revolutionary general and son of the sculptor, Thomas Crawford, was born at Bagni di Lucca, Tuscany, in 1854. Though the father lived in Rome, he sent his son to prepare for college at St. Paul's School, New Hampshire, and then to Harvard; but Crawford soon left Cambridge to study successively at the English Cambridge, Heidelberg, and Rome. Having become interested in Sanskrit, and having lost the expectation of a fortune, he went to India and there edited *The Indian Herald* at Allahabad. But he shortly returned to America, spent another year upon Sanskrit with Professor Lanman of Harvard, and wrote his first novel, *Mr. Isaacs* (1882), on the advice of an uncle who had been struck by Crawford's oral account

of a Persian jewel merchant who in the story is elaborated into the mysterious protagonist. The success was prompt and complete, like that of George Wood in *The Three Fates* (1892), which is admitted to be partly autobiographical. Crawford recognized his vocation once for all. The melodramatic *Doctor Claudius*, with its unabashed mixture of nationalities and characters and motives, followed the next year. Thomas Bailey Aldrich asked for a serial in the *Atlantic* and got *A Roman Singer* (1884), the story of an Italian urchin with a marvelous voice who rises to fame and marries the daughter of a Prussian count. *To Leeward* (1884) tells how the English wife of an Italian husband deceives him and is murdered for it. In *An American Politician* (1885) Crawford did what an innocent bystander could with politics as played in Boston. *Zoroaster* (1885), written also in French by Crawford himself, plunged headlong into the past, into affairs of intrigue and love in the Persia of Darius. Crawford's recollections of that period of his schooling which he had passed at Hatfield Regis appeared in *A Tale of a Lonely Parish* (1886). *Marzio's Crucifix* (1887), written also in French as well, deals with the career of an Italian metal worker at Rome who carries on the ancient traditions of Benvenuto Cellini but who is bewildered by modern ideas. *Paul Patoff* (1887) was based upon adventures which Crawford had himself had in Constantinople. *Saracinesca* (1887) first represented the great Roman family of Saracinesca. *With the Immortals* (1888) brought Heine, Chopin, Julius Cæsar, Leonardo da Vinci, Francis the First, Dr. Johnson, the Chevalier Bayard, and Pascal together in a delightful post-mortem symposium near Sor-

rento, where with certain fortunate mortals they discuss human affairs.

In half a dozen years Crawford had written ten novels of a remarkable variety, and the remainder of his life but continued this brilliant beginning. Having returned to Italy in 1883, he thereafter spent most of his life at Sorrento in a quiet activity almost never disturbed. As no biography has been published, the published facts of his career are not numerous. It is generally known, however, that he continued to travel widely, married, grew wealthy from the sale of his novels, became a Roman Catholic, and died in 1909.

Except that toward the end of his life Crawford partly turned from fiction to sober — and not remarkably spirited — history, he can hardly be said to have changed his methods from his earliest novel to his last. Improvisation was his knack and forte; he wrote rapidly and much — sometimes an entire novel in a month. He once said that, at least in his mature years, his imagination was constantly peopled with a swarming mass of human figures, of whom a group would now and then suddenly come together in a set of relationships and compel him to record them in a novel. His settings he took down, for the most part, from personal observation in the many localities he knew at first hand; his characters, too, are frequently studied from actual persons. In his plots, commonly held his peculiar merit, Crawford cannot be called really original; he employs all the ancient and honorable paraphernalia of melodrama — lost or hidden wills, forgeries, great persons in disguise, sudden legacies, physical violence. Moreover, it is almost a formula with

him to carry a story by natural motives until about the last third, when melodrama enters to perplex the narrative and to keep up suspense until the triumphant and satisfying dénouement. And yet so fresh, strong, and veracious is the movement that it nearly obscures these conventional elements. Movement, indeed, not plot in any stricter sense, is Crawford's primary excellence. He could not tell a story badly, but flowed on without breaking or faltering, managing his material and disposing his characters and scenes without a symptom of effort, in a style always clear and bright. This lightness of movement is accompanied, perhaps accounted for, by a general absence of profound ideas or of much of that rich color of life which comes only — as in Scott, Balzac, Tolstoy — when fiction is deeply rooted in some particular soil. As to his ideas, Crawford seems to have had few that were unusual, and he disliked the employment of unusual ideas in fiction, about the aims and uses of which he is very explicit in *The Novel: What It Is* (1893). Anglo-Saxons had recently been learning — through the critical pens of Stevenson and Howells and Henry James, to name no others — that fiction has an art which may be discussed; that a novel is not merely a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, to be boiled and swallowed and nothing more done about it. In answer to all these serious critics Crawford declared that novelists are "public amusers," who must always write largely about love and in Anglo-Saxon countries must write under the eyes of the ubiquitous young girl. They might therefore, he concluded, as well be reconciled to the exigencies of their business, and by thinking not too highly of it spare themselves the agony that

goes with the more apocalyptic arts. For his own part he thought problem novels odious, cared nothing for dialect and local color, believed it a mistake to make a novel too minute a picture of one generation lest another should think it old-fashioned, and preferred to regard the novel as a sort of pocket theater — with ideals, it must be added, much like those of the British and American stage in the decades just before Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw came to add something of intellectual distinction to the entertainment.

Thus far Crawford was carried by his cosmopolitan training and ideals: he believed that human beings are the same everywhere and can be made intelligible if reported lucidly and discreetly. Reading his books is like conversing with a remarkably humane, sharp-eyed traveler who appears — at least at first glance — to have seen every nook and corner of the globe and to have talked naturally to all the natives in their own languages. How many other novelists have known, as Crawford did, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Russian, Turkish, Portugese, the ancient tongues taught ordinarily in universities, and Sanskrit? Crawford ranges, too, with apparent ease though with no great antiquarian knowledge, through large areas of recorded time, from the days of Belshazzar to the modern United States. Of his later novels, *Khaled* (1891) is a vivid and lovely tale of Arabia with something of the color of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and *Via Crucis* (1898) moves from England to the East during the crusading twelfth century; *The Witch of Prague* (1891) localizes a wildly supernatural legend in Bohemia; *Greifenstein* (1889) is

a study of German military pride against the background of the Black Forest, and *The Cigarette-Maker's Romance* (1890), rapid, exciting, moving, transacts its charming drama among the artisans of Munich; *In the Palace of the King* (1900) is a chapter from the romantic history of Don John of Austria; *Fair Margaret* (1905) and its sequels *The Primadonna* (1908) and *The Diva's Ruby* (1908) all concern themselves with European — chiefly English — musical life; *Marion Darche* (1893), *Katherine Lauderdale* (1894), and its sequel *The Ralstons* (1895) have their scenes laid, though not always convincingly, in and about New York.

On the whole, however, the Italian novels are best of all, though several of them which Crawford wrote toward the end of his life add little to the total sum. *The Children of the King* (1892), recounting the fatal love of a common sailor for a lady, glows with the romantic ardor which temporarily satisfies all but the sternest realistic dispositions. *Pietro Ghisleri* (1893), as lifelike and vigorous a book as any Crawford wrote, seems to derive some power from its connection with the Saracinesca group. *Saracinesca* (1887), *Sant' Ilario* (1889), *Don Orsino* (1892), and *Corleone* (1896) have all helped one another to reputation by the fact that they make up a cycle dealing generally with the same persons and centered about the fortunes of one great patriarchal house. In the first of the series Giovanni Saracinesca, only son of the old Prince of that name, loves and wins Corona d'Astrardente, whom the Roman world holds to be unquestionably the most superb woman in Europe. In *Sant' Ilario,* Giovanni, who is also Prince of Sant'

Ilario, becomes mistakenly jealous of his wife and both suffer deeply. Their eldest son, Orsino, in *Don Orsino* gets involved in the building craze which swept over Rome in 1887. *Corleone* concerns Orsino and his brother Ippolito, the priest, taking the two of them to Sicily where they fall foul of bandits. The series is held together by the dominating figure of the magnificent old Prince Saracinesca, father of Don Giovanni. Of almost equal importance are San Giacinto, the giant cousin of the Saracinesca, Spicca, the melancholy but infallible duelist who dies in *Don Orsino*, Anastase Gouache, the French painter of whom Giovanni is jealous, and the villain Del Ferice. There are admirable melodramatic episodes: Giovanni's duel with Del Ferice; the plot of old Montevarchi to prove that Prince Leone Saracinesca is not really head of his house; the sacrifice of Maria Consuelo d'Aranjuez, who marries Del Ferice to save Orsino whom she loves but who faces ruin by Del Ferice; the trick of Tebaldo Corleone who confesses a murder to Ippolito in order to bind the priest to secrecy and then accuses Ippolito of the murder.

Without question, the peculiarly absorbing form of the four novels comes from the large admixture of melodrama. Without question, too, the characters are enlarged decidedly above verisimilitude by valiant deeds and lofty sentiments and eloquent speech. And yet neither melodrama nor heroic dimensions constitute the final impression of the Saracinesca cycle. That impression is rather of an admirable section of modern life admirably portrayed. Crawford understood the generous simplicity of the Italian character; he studied it here under the

most attractive conditions, in a society which still retained many of its feudal elements until after the taking of Rome in 1870. Although the career of Giovanni in 1865–1867 offers many contrasts to that of Orsino in 1887, the family character remains much the same — the same simple integrity which has no baser element than pride. While there have naturally been controversies as to Crawford's accuracy of representation, the most serious charge against him is a partiality for the old order. Among Anglo-Saxon novelists, however, he is incomparable as an historian of Italy. And even where the charges against him hold, he still deserves the credit of adding a remarkable province to the world of the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Among American novelists he takes his rank as the most cosmopolitan of them all and as on the whole the best story-teller. That he occupies, however, as compared with the greatest novelists, distinctly a lower rank, is a natural consequence of his method. No man can range so widely and still go deep. Crawford's success with the Roman novels only confirms this dogma. Although he always called himself an American, he knew Rome better than any other quarter of the globe; and where his knowledge was greatest he went deepest. In such a *tour de force* as *Khaled* or in such a romantic melodrama as *The Cigarette-Maker's Romance* he went far on the wings of an excited imagination, but not as far as profounder observations took him in *Pietro Ghisleri* or *Saracinesca*. Realism, like charity, must begin somewhere near home.

CHAPTER X

REACTION AND PROGRESS

I. Toward the Right: Rococo Romance

Diversified as were the types of fiction during the eighties, what actually prevailed then was a sort of official realism, expounded by Howells and James and practised by most of the novelists of the decade at least in style or structure if not always in materials. From this most refined and, on the whole, most artistic moment in the history of the American novel, there followed two reactions. Perhaps the movement toward a harsher realism, an avowed naturalism, should hardly be called a reaction, proceeding as it did not so much by a return to some earlier mode as by an advance to a new idiom of actuality; still it indicated a temperamental reaction from the gentilities of the established school. The rush of historical romance, however, which amounted to a deluge at about the time of the war with Spain, was clearly a reaction. As to form and doctrine, it proceeded largely from the example of Robert Louis Stevenson, who had taken issue with the realists in defense of his own eager preferences for the tradition of Scott, and who in England had led an active group of romancers to new if not classic triumphs. Having set themselves in opposition to the current habits of realism, these romancers naturally limited themselves as compared with Scott, who was

romancer and realist both at once, but they brought to the revived form a dexterity of plot and a neatness of finish which Scott had lacked. The American romancers of the period, accompanying their British contemporaries in art, at the same time kept for the most part at home in their choice of themes and matter.

The local color writers had frequently dipped into such history as their sections afforded, though employing history generally as handmaid not mistress. Within two or three years after Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886) and Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), history in the American novel assumed an importance it had not had since Cooper and Hawthorne. Arthur Sherburne Hardy in 1889 published *Passe Rose*, a dainty romance of the time of Charlemagne, and Harold Frederic, the next year, *In the Valley*, a substantial, unaffected narrative of life along the Mohawk at the time of the French and Indian War. The material thus touched upon by Frederic had already been discovered by Mary Hartwell Catherwood, who probably thought of Stevenson but certainly thought of Francis Parkman, who wrote an introduction to *The Romance of Dollard* (1889) vouching for its historicity. She had discovered a new romantic treasure; the angular quaintness of Pike County now gave way before the charm of an older world adventuring in the Middle West, noblemen pitted against savages, black-robed Jesuits, *coureurs de bois* swarming through all the rivers and forests, high-bred ladies strayed into the wilderness, innocent Indian maidens, half-breed villains, French villages as little as possible like the Anglo-Saxon towns which had grown up on their ancient sites.

Mrs. Catherwood during the years 1889–1894 forecast almost all the developments of the more fecund years from 1896–1902 which saw the most active school of historical romances the United States has produced. Merely to name the more successful performances of the period suffices to show in what fashion the romantic imagination then worked: Mark Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896), James Lane Allen's *The Choir Invisible* (1897), Richard Harding Davis's *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897), S. Weir Mitchell's *Hugh Wynne* (1897) and *The Adventures of François* (1898), Charles Major's *When Knighthood Was in Flower* (1898), Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock* (1898), Mary Johnston's *Prisoners of Hope* (1898) and *To Have and to Hold* (1899), F. Marion Crawford's *Via Crucis* (1898) and *In the Palace of the King* (1900), Paul Leicester Ford's *Janice Meredith* (1899), Winston Churchill's *Richard Carvel* (1899), *The Crisis* (1901), and *The Crossing* (1904), Booth Tarkington's *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1900), Maurice Thompson's *Alice of Old Vincennes* (1900), Henry Harland's *The Cardinal's Snuff-Box* (1901), George Barr McCutcheon's *Graustark* (1901), Robert W. Chambers's *Cardigan* (1901), Mary Hartwell Catherwood's *Lazarre* (1901), Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), Gertrude Atherton's *The Conqueror* (1902), Ellen Glasgow's *The Battleground* (1902) and *Deliverance* (1904), John Fox's *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903). Mary E. Wilkins Freeman left her austere tales of rural New England to write a romance of the swashbuckling seventeenth century, *The Heart's Highway* (1900); Edward Bellamy similarly turned away from his forte in *The*

Duke of Stockbridge (1900), and Cable in *The Cavalier* (1901), and Miss Jewett in *The Tory Lover* (1901), and Frank R. Stockton in *Kate Bonnet* (1902). After 1902 the type began rapidly to decline, both in energy and popularity. Mary Johnston persisted in romance for several years, but her contemporaries, Winston Churchill, Ellen Glasgow, Booth Tarkington, moved on toward realism with the times. The older writers who had been drawn aside by the episode nearly all went back to their earlier methods. Even Churchill's *The Crossing* in 1904 seemed belated, and Weir Mitchell's *The Red City* in 1908 decidedly so; in *The Slim Princess* (1907) George Ade parodied the "Ruritanian" romance popularized by Anthony Hope in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) and still continued by George Barr McCutcheon in *Beverly of Graustark* (1904) and later inanities; Frederick Jesup Stimson's *My Story* (1917), an ostensible autobiography of Benedict Arnold, seemed almost prehistoric; and Irving Bacheller's *A Man for the Ages* (1919) had to depend for its vogue upon the recent great increase of interest in Lincoln.

Such of these narratives as dealt in any way with the present generally took their slashing, skylarking, and robustly Yankee heroes, as in *Soldiers of Fortune* or *Graustark*, off to more or less imaginary regions for deeds of haughty daring and exotic wooing. Elsewhere, even in the romances with a foreign scene, taste ran to the past: to the whirling Paris of the French Revolution as in *François* or to the frilled and powdered Bath of the eighteenth century as in *Monsieur Beaucaire;* or still further to the Tudor sixteenth century of *When Knighthood Was in*

Flower or the French fifteenth century of *Joan of Arc.* The bulk of the romancers, however, as in Cooper's time, kept their imaginations ordinarily at home. *Red Rock* and *Deliverance* chronicled on a large if rather melodramatic scale the process of Reconstruction in Virginia; *The Crisis, The Cavalier,* and *The Battleground* are all transacted during the Civil War in the regions respectively of the middle and lower Mississippi and of Virginia; *Lazarre* revived the old tradition that the Dauphin had been brought to America to grow up among the Indians; and *Kate Bonnet* made its heroine a mythical daughter of that very authentic buccaneer of the early eighteenth century, Stede Bonnet. And yet these belong but to the fringes of the historical fiction of their day. Much as with Cooper's contemporaries, these American romancers exploited the American matters of the Settlement, the Revolution, and the Frontier. As the frontier, of course, no longer meant to Americans what it had meant when it still occupied a great portion of the continent, the romancers made less of it than of the other standard matters. *The Virginian,* which is really an older dime novel somewhat glorified, accurately if sentimentally preserves in its pictures of cowboy life in Wyoming the habits and speech of those amazing Centaurs of the last frontier who, though now practically banished from reality, are still firmly fixed in the national memory. Other records of that phase were racier and crisper but no one has been quite so well remembered. *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come,* as well as earlier and later novels by the same hand, portrayed the backward mountaineers of Kentucky whose manner of life in 1900 still

resembled that of the frontier of Cooper and Simms. If the matter of the Frontier partially eluded the ardor of the romancers, nothing of the sort happened to the Settlement and the Revolution, which now luxuriantly bloomed again. The hardships of pioneering and of warfare were united in *Alice of Old Vincennes*, an account of the expedition of George Rogers Clark, and in *The Crossing*, which portrayed the West during the Revolutionary and Federalist eras from Vincennes and Kaskaskia on the north and from the Carolinas on the east to the Mississippi and to Louisiana. The true territory of romance, however, lay east of the Alleghanies, between New Jersey and Richmond. For every tale concerned with New England or New York there were two or three concerned with Pennsylvania or Virginia. *The Tory Lover* moves from Miss Jewett's gentle Berwick to Europe and back: *The Duke of Stockbridge* is a romance of Shays' Rebellion. But *The Heart's Highway* hovers around Jamestown at the end of its first century; *Prisoners of Hope* and *To Have and to Hold* rarely stray far from Tide Water; *Richard Carvel* joins the England of Dr. Johnson with Revolutionary Maryland; *Hugh Wynne* and *Janice Meredith* range from New York to Yorktown, yet the center of their interests is the Philadelphia of the Continental Congress.

Topographical classification is practically as suitable with these tales as with those of the first period of American romance. Certain distinctions of course appear. *Joan of Arc* stands clearly to one side by virtue of a power which none of its rivals display. *The Choir Invisible* employs history only incidentally in a poetic and highly sentimental interpretation of human existence.

To Have and to Hold is more ornate in style, *Monsieur Beaucaire* more graceful and piquant, *The Crossing* more grandiose in its sweep, than the ordinary run. *Janice Meredith* is based upon remarkable erudition and *Hugh Wynne* remarkably sums up the traditions of Philadelphia as remembered by the descendants of her Augustan age. In spite of these distinctions, however, the general corpus of such romances forms a singularly unified mass. Certain themes like the importation of wives to Virginia, the fate of gentlemen who desperately came over as indentured servants ("convicts"), the exploits of John Paul Jones, are repeated again and again. Historical personalities so crowd the scene that a hero or a heroine can hardly step out upon the street or go to dinner without encountering some eminent man — particularly Franklin or Washington, or some one of the colonial governors of Virginia. While intensely American in reporting the conflicts with English rule, the stories almost always sympathize with the colonial and Revolutionary gentry as against the humbler orders, with Washington as against Jefferson, with the aristocratic emigrés from France as against the revolutionists. Details of costume load the narrative far more than descriptions of landscape. Fine gentlemen, called "Cavaliers" till the word becomes a byword, flutter and ruffle across the stage, with splendid gestures and delicate points of honor, sudden in quarrel, quick with quaint oaths, incomparable at the small sword or the minuet, poetic and patriotic and heroic. With them in all their lighter moments are exquisite ladies, generally very young but with some dowagers among them, who live in spacious, cool houses, in a world of mahogany

and silver and brocade; ladies who ardently expect new bales of clothing from London but who joyfully sacrifice all such delights during the Revolution; ladies who rise late, take the air genteelly, play at lovely needlework, and spend their nights at balls of elaborate splendor; and yet ladies who know the saddle and, when need comes, put off their squeamishness and rough it in the most dangerous escapades without a tremor. One formula furnishes something like half the notable plots: an honest American gentleman, mortally opposed to a villain who is generally British, courts a beautiful American girl through acute vicissitudes and wins her only in the bitter end just before or after killing his wicked rival in a duel. As if this were a theater of marionettes there are only a few puppets, though there are plenty of handsome costumes to vary the entertainment. As might be expected, the style of all these novels approaches identity, a fluid, languid style, ready to slip into blank verse at the provocation of any heightened moment, and constantly tinctured with a faint archaism of diction and rhythm. "There is an old book my grandchildren love to hear me read to them," says Hugh Wynne in a tone which would fit nearly every novel of the time. "It is the 'Morte d'Arthur,' done into English by Sir Thomas Malory. Often when I read therein of how Arthur the king bade farewell to the world and to the last of the great company of his Knights of the Round Table, this scene at Whitehall slip [Washington's farewell to his officers] comes back to me, and I seem to see once more those gallant soldiers, and far away the tall figure of surely the knightliest gentleman our days have known."

The reference to Malory — who in *The Choir Invisible* is cited as the truest teacher of virtue — illuminates the aims and methods of all the rococo romancers. Writing of a time so recent as the Civil War or Reconstruction, they could use a dialect almost contemporary, but the moment they drew near to the Revolution or the Settlement they fell into the language which the nineteenth century had thought the fit medium for medieval deeds. The deeper American past to the romancers seemed a sort of middle age. Their inferiority to the Cooper of the *Leather-Stocking Tales* or to the Melville of *Moby Dick* lies in the fact that whereas Cooper and Melville, much as they might invent, still worked upon a solid basis in a mood not too far from the mood of realism, their successors wrote romance pure and simple, even when they were most erudite. Romance was in the air. Not all the publishing enterprise which developed romances into "best sellers" and distributed millions of copies could have done so but for the moment of national expansiveness which attended the Spanish War. Patriotism and jingoism, altruism and imperialism, passion and sentimentalism, shook the temper which had slowly been stiffening since the Civil War. Now, with a rush of unaccustomed emotions the national imagination sought out its own past, delighting in it, wallowing in it. Had the romancers who met the mood been more deeply grounded in reality and less sentimental, or had the national mood lasted for a longer time, some eminent masterpiece might have emerged. None did, and the gold lace and gilt of the narratives actually evoked began to tarnish almost as soon as the wind touched them. But it was an episode

not without charm and not without a considerable romantic energy.

Of the novels *Hugh Wynne* perhaps came closest to permanence, and S. Weir Mitchell (1829–1913) of the writers who are no longer living most deserves special mention. A Philadelphian, he set aside his youthful literary ambitions on the advice of Oliver Wendell Holmes, made himself a distinguished medical specialist, particularly in nervous diseases, and only after fifty gave much time to the verse and fiction which he wrote henceforth until his death. His professional knowledge enabled him to write authoritatively of difficult and wayward states of body and mind: as in *The Case of George Dedlow* (1880), so circumstantial in its improbabilities, *Roland Blake* (1886), which George Meredith admired, *The Autobiography of a Quack* (1900), concerning the dishonorable purlieus of the medical profession, and *Constance Trescott* (1905), considered by Mitchell his best constructed novel and certainly his most thorough-going study of a pathological mood. His psychological stories, however, had neither quite the appeal nor quite the merit of his historical romances, which began with *Hephzibah Guinness* (1880) and extended to *Westways* (1913). *Westways* is a chronicle of the effects of the Civil War in Pennsylvania, but Mitchell's best work belongs to the Revolutionary cycle: *Hugh Wynne*, the career of a Free Quaker on Washington's staff, *The Red City*, a picture of Washington's second administration, and *The Adventures of François*, which stands as close to the American stories as did the revolutionary Paris to the city of Franklin. Philadelphia, so often the center of action, appears under

a softer, mellower light than has been thrown by romance upon any other Revolutionary city, and Washington, though drawn, like Philadelphia, as much to the life as Mitchell could draw him, is still a stately demigod.

Since the decline of the rococo mode there has been no definite school of romancers in America, although the cult of Lincoln, both in poetry and imaginative prose, since the Lincoln centennial in 1909 has furnished a theme which may reasonably be expected to assume a large importance in any future revival of romance. The Revolution and the Settlement have had their chief exponents among writers of juvenile fiction; the Frontier has attracted the notice of the moving pictures to an enormous extent; the sea has been exploited in the overpraised tales of Morgan Robertson. The World War elicited, of course, an enormous number of romantic inventions, but they were restricted, almost without exception, to the melodramatic tradition of subliterary entertainment: German plots, German spies, dashing Yankee heroes, tender maidens. In dozens and scores of such novels the narrative begins in an effeminate or troubled peace, and then brings in the war with a rush of trial and purgation. Some of them skilful as propaganda, not one has the look of permanence.

2. Toward the Left: Naturalism

Among the followers of Howells toward realism, even though they might be genuine disciples, there was bound to come sooner or later a discontent with the gentleness which restrained him from portraying the unlovely or

illicit phases of American society. The earliest manifestations of this discontent, not always conscious, came from men and women who had studied farming conditions and, like E. W. Howe in Kansas and Joseph Kirkland in Illinois, had found in them little that justified the smooth idyls of certain of the local color writers. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman in her short stories of New England, *A Humble Romance and Other Stories* (1887) and *A New England Nun and Other Stories* (1891); Harold Frederic in his novel of rural New York, *Seth's Brother's Wife* (1887); Hamlin Garland in his hard pastorals of the upper Middle West, *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Prairie Folks* (1893)— all these proceeded in a less cheerful mood than fiction had ordinarily employed in the eighties, and Garland was passionately devoted to the war on needless poverty which had already enlisted Henry George and Edward Bellamy. Ambrose Bierce's fierce *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891) — later called *In the Midst of Life* — added a sardonic note rare in American literature. That the short story at first prevailed among these new writers was owing to the enormous popularity of Kipling, who had developed the methods of Bret Harte and had returned them to America with interest. The novel, however, early shared the new impetus, which had a characteristic exposition in Hamlin Garland's essays, *Crumbling Idols* (1894). It was no longer enough, the new novelists argued and felt, to skim rosy surfaces. The novel, a powerful modern agency for civilization, must go deeper than it had gone in the United States, must turn to the light various ugly realities which, too long neglected, were growing more dangerous every day. It

must deal candidly with political corruption, with economic injustice, with religious unrest, with sexual irregularities, with greed and doubt and hate and cruelty and blood, as well as with its standard subjects. It must assert its rights, its obligation, to speak of anything it chose, provided only the thing were true.

Doctrines so unquestionable, and in time so unquestioned, in the early nineties aroused vigorous antagonism. One pious reviewer declared that one of Mrs. Deland's books combined "the blasphemy of Ingersoll and the obscenity of Zola." In the preface to *Summer in Arcady* (1896) James Lane Allen protested against "those black chaotic books of the new fiction" which had lately come from Europe and were disturbing the simple virtues of American life. Tolstoy to many seemed unpardonably frank, and Flaubert and Zola to most seemed simply wicked, so strong was the tradition of optimism, decorum, reticence, in American fiction. Established habits of "decency," by which was meant a solicitous reserve in matters of sex and of suffering in general, did not break up, but the novel extended its inquiries to numerous matters rarely considered in the eighties. Three novels published in 1894 represent the transition: Mrs. Freeman's *Pembroke*, a study of New England stubbornness; Mrs. Deland's *Philip and His Wife*, a study of an unhappy marriage; and Paul Leicester Ford's *The Honorable Peter Stirling*, a chronicle of politics built up around the career, here idealized, of President Cleveland.

Late in 1895 appeared a striking novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, which definitely belonged to the new fiction. Its author, Stephen Crane (1871–1900), was a

genius who admired Tolstoy and who somewhat febrilely aimed at absolute truthfulness. He had already written and printed *Maggie* (1893; published 1896), a horrible picture of a degenerate Irish family in New York and the tragedy of a daughter who by the brutality she has to face at home is driven in desperation to the streets. The style is hard and bald; Crane betrays a youthful partizan's delight in candor on forbidden topics; he piles up savage details with violent plain-speaking; the plot amounts to nothing more than a succession of writhing tableaus of blood or wretchedness. And yet, despite a good deal that is metallic in its construction, the book has effectiveness and sincerity. In its sort it outdid any native naturalistic novel yet offered to the American public, and after a generation it remains an interesting document in the history of naturalism. But Crane's great success attended *The Red Badge of Courage*, an episode of the Civil War. At the time of writing he knew war only from books, but the books he knew were Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and probably Zola's *Débâcle*. The plumes and trumpets and glory of battle consequently do not appear. The protagonist is a recruit for the first time under fire. Crane had but to imagine himself in a similar danger and reconstruct the moods that came over him. What he produced was amazingly brilliant. His recruit knows nothing of the general plan of the conflict. He obeys commands that he does not understand, that he resents, that he hates. His excited senses color the occasion, even the landscape. He suffers agonies of fatigue and almost a catastrophe of fear before he can be acclimated to his adventure. If he seems unusually imagina-

tive, still he is imagined without too much subtlety. He speaks a convincing boyish dialect. His sensations are limited to something like his spiritual capacity. And the narrative as a whole Crane holds firmly in hand, pointing his prose with clean touches, heightening it here and there with poetry, warming it with an emotion which still leaves him critical. *The Red Badge of Courage* is a genuine feat of the imagination.

Crane's later novels and short stories, though some are vivid, add nothing to these two novels, and his early death truncated his career. Early death, too, cut off Wolcott Balestier, Kipling's brother-in-law, and Harold Frederic, both men of promise, but never of more than promise. None of them, not even Crane, equaled Frank Norris (1870–1902), whom death at thirty-two could not cheat out of at least one masterpiece. The fame of Norris has always been colored by expectations of what he might have become had he lived to realize them. He seemed, as the older century ended and the new one opened, an authentic and prophetic voice. A leader in the little movement to "continentalize" American literature as a protest against local color, he was himself one of the least sectional of novelists. Born in Chicago, where he passed his boyhood, a student of art in Paris for two years, student for four years at the University of California and for one graduate year at Harvard, newspaper correspondent in South Africa at the time of the Jameson raid and in Cuba during the Santiago campaign, and later a journalist in San Francisco, Norris had a vision of American life which was geographically very wide. He was not a victim of any arid cosmopolitanism, for Zola,

his chief teacher, and Kipling had taught Norris how much the strength of realism depends upon facts observed in their native places. And though one of his earliest passions was for Froissart, and his first book, *Yvernelle* (1892), was a verse romance upon a medieval French theme, his mature plots were laid almost entirely in settings with which he was familiar. That so many of them are Californian must be ascribed to his early death; he meant later to turn to other regions.

What gave Norris this large "continental" view of his materials was a certain epic disposition which he had. He tended to vast plans and conceived trilogies. His Epic of the Wheat — *The Octopus* (1901), which deals with the production of wheat in California, *The Pit* (1903), which deals with the distribution of wheat through the Chicago Board of Trade, and *The Wolf*, which, though never written, was to have dealt with the relieving of a famine in Europe by American wheat — he thought of as three distinct novels, bound together only by the cosmic spirit of the wheat which comes up from the abundant earth and moves irresistibly to its appointed purpose, guided, of course, by men, and fought and played over by them, but always mightier than they and always their master as well as their sustenance. Another trilogy to which he meant to give years of work would have centered about the battle of Gettysburg, one part for each day, and would have sought to present what Norris considered the American spirit as his Epic of the Wheat sought to present an impersonal force of nature. Such conceptions explain the grandiose manner which Norris never lost and they serve to explain, too, the passion of his naturalism.

As to his actual achievement, *The Pit*, though its success on the stage and its vivid presentation of a thrilling drama of business made it more popular than *The Octopus*, is certainly inferior to the first member of the series. With greater ease and lucidity, it has less poetry, less depth of scene and texture, less final significance. In proportion as mere trafficking in wheat is a less organic function than either growing it or eating it, so *The Pit* falls in interest and power below *The Octopus*, which takes high rank among the best of American novels. The Octopus of the title is the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad which holds the wheat growers of California in its cruel tentacles, able if it likes to deny them access to their natural markets, and consequently a symbol of the control which economic machinery exercises over the elements of life. The book sets forth the drama of Agriculture and Trade locked in a fierce conflict, with Trade for the moment villain and victor. Norris's sympathies lie with the oppressed ranchmen; the Railroad has the iron teeth and ruthless hunger of the Old Witch of juvenile melodrama; in the end, though the ranchers have been defeated, the wheat itself too symbolically pours in upon the agent of the Railroad and destroys him — the wheat "untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless." And yet these cosmic implications do not remove the story too far from actual existence in California. The canvas swarms with actualities — plowing, planting, harvesting, sheep-herding, merry-making, rabbit-killing, love, labor, birth, death. Intimately involved with the

hard, sordid strife of daily affairs are fine, if not always quite realized, phases of poetry and faith. The style, though tending always to turgidity, is strong and full; the movement, though at times nervous, is rapid; the pictures, though perhaps excessively panoramic, are always richly alive.

The passion which informs *The Octopus*, a kind of fiery zeal for truth which lifted and enlarged all Norris wrote, is the quality which marked him off from the older realism of Howells. Zola had it, and Norris, who called Zola "the very head of the Romanticists," was even willing to name his own form of naturalism romantic if he could thus argue for the use in fiction of deeper and more stirring truths than those minute, those surface matters which, in his judgment, were the chief stock in trade of official realism. Perhaps the most obvious instance in his work of this romantic tendency is the story of Vanamee in *The Octopus*, the sheep-herder who has mystical communion with the spirit of his dead mistress. But equally romantic, in fact, is Norris's constant preoccupation with "elemental" emotions. His heroes are nearly all violent men, wilful, passionate, combative; his heroines — thick-haired, large-armed women, almost all of a single physical type — are endowed with a frank and deep, if slow vitality. Love in Norris's world is the mating of vikings and valkyries. A plain case of such heroic passions may be found in *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898), the story of a civilized young San Franciscan who is shanghaied upon a Pacific fishing boat and, among many adventures, meets and loves the splendid Norse savage, Moran, whom he wins with the valor aroused in him by a

primitive life. *Blix* (1899) and *A Man's Woman* (1900) and *The Octopus* and *The Pit* only repeat this pair of lovers in varying costumes and occupations. In *McTeague* (1899) the protagonist, married to a woman of a different type, finally murders her. Love, however, is by no means the chief concern of these novels, which are crowded with ardently detailed phases of life which had not yet appeared, or at least had not yet become common, in American fiction: shark-fishing and beach-combing off the California coast; the routine doings of vulgar people in San Francisco and the city's Bohemian aspects; the deadly perils of Arctic exploration; the materials of *The Octopus* already cited; the enormous conflicts of trading in the Chicago Wheat pit; the ugly dissipations of undergraduates as presented in the posthumous but early *Vandover and the Brute* (1914). In all these Norris sought to find the basic elements of human nature and to present them with unhesitating accuracy. His eagerness to be truthful in a new way gave him his energy, particularly in scenes of action, although the same eagerness deprived him of mellow reflection and rounded grace. His volume of essays, *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (1903), companion in theory to Hamlin Garland's *Crumbling Idols*, shows him to have been less a thinker than a passionate partizan of the rising doctrine of naturalism. It shows, too, how large was the store in him of a fire and an energy which would not lightly have perished had he lived, but must have carried him on to growth and varied triumphs.

Norris was but one of a group of novelists who began their careers about 1900, in the very midst of the hulla-

balloo of rococo romance — indeed, more or less as a protest against it. Theodore Dreiser with *Sister Carrie* (1900) initiated his powerful, vexed career. Edith Wharton wrote her early short stories with caustic irony and without sentimentalism; Stewart Edward White in *The Blazed Trail* (1902) escaped from civilization to the thrilling rigors of Michigan lumber camps. Brand Whitlock, titularly a disciple of Howells, in *The 13th District* (1902), and Alfred Henry Lewis in *The Boss* (1903), exposed the mean crafts of politics; Robert Herrick, particularly in his *Memoirs of an American Citizen* (1905), hated the rose-color and fatuous optimism of conventional fiction; Charles D. Stewart in *The Fugitive Blacksmith* (1905) produced a strangely neglected and yet a singularly diverting picaresque tale; Upton Sinclair, romancer in *Manassas* (1904), turned in *The Jungle* (1906) to his fierce warfare upon the abuses of modern industrial America; William Allen White in his volume of stories *In Our Town* (1906) touched critical notes not always apparent in his work. All these writers are still living.

One writer associated with them, David Graham Phillips (1867–1911), calls for especial mention. Like most of the others a Middle Westerner and a journalist, he emerged from the era of public muck-raking and carried his assault into the private lives represented in his novels. He believed — and proposed his doctrines in *The Reign of Gilt* (1905) — that democracy is essentially more decent and more efficient than aristocracy; that most of the confusions and distortions of American life arise from the restricting hand which various forms of privilege lay upon it; that it is the duty as well as the natural

behavior of a novelist to reveal existent conditions without favors or reserves. In a score of novels composed with a fierce energy he ranged over the American scene in his hunt for snobbery and stupidity and cruelty and greed, turning them up to the light with a gusto not matched by the art of his revelations. Serious as his books are in intention, useful as documents, no one of them is a masterpiece and no one of them shows any very definite signs of surviving, though the bulky *Susan Lenox* (1917) has considerable notoriety as one of the fullest portraits of an American courtesan. With all his powers, Phillips was crude and heavy: he had neither the bright concentration of Stephen Crane nor the symbolic meaning and poetry of Frank Norris nor the large, blundering tenderness of Theodore Dreiser. He is hopelessly deficient in charm, and his undoubted merits do not make up for the deficiency.

Jack London (1876–1916) was a novelist of the American proletariat. Born in California, the son of a frontier scout and trapper, he lived as a boy in an ordinary bourgeois environment, tempered by the novels and romantic history which he insatiably devoured. At fourteen he left school to become an unskilled laborer in a dozen occupations, becoming in time an oyster-pirate and a longshoreman in and near the bay of San Francisco and shipping before the mast at seventeen to go as far as Japan and the Bering Sea. In a mood of disgust induced by overwork he became at eighteen a tramp who covered ten thousand miles in the United States and Canada during the hard times of the early nineties and who made up his mind that he could no longer continue

in the treadmill which his great bodily strength had heretofore regarded as a pleasure and which his reading had told him was a virtue. Home once more, he encountered books which confirmed him in his resolution. A year at the University of California and a winter in the Klondike during the gold rush still further confirmed him: he became a socialist and a revolutionist; with enormous labors he made himself into a popular writer, discovered that the politer world which he consequently entered was not all he had imagined it, and once for all cast in his fortunes with the working class. He visited the East End of London, cruised in the South Seas, acted as correspondent during the Russo-Japanese War and in Mexico in 1914, lectured and traveled and farmed and made large sums of money till the end of his life.

As a propagandist for socialism he wrote *War of the Classes* (1905), *Revolution* (1910), and *The Iron Heel* (1908), a romance recounting an imaginary revolution of 1932. Of his autobiographical writings *The People of the Abyss* (1903), his adventures in the London slums, *The Road* (1907), his life as a tramp, *Martin Eden* (1909), his struggles in learning to write, *The Cruise of The Snark* (1911), a voyage in the Pacific, *John Barleycorn* (1913), his alcoholic memories, are most important, although autobiography colors all his records and inventions. His popularity and his eagerness for money tempted him to write much, especially in the way of short stories, that was decidedly below his better level, and he never, indeed, rose above his first marked success, *The Call of the Wild* (1903). Although he constantly played with ideas in his books, and liked to hint naïvely at his

learning, he wrote always under the obsession of physical energy. What was "elemental" in Frank Norris became "abysmal" in Jack London. He carried the cult of "red blood" in literature to an extreme at which it began to sink to the ridiculous, as in his lineal descendants of the moving-pictures. His heroes, whether wolves or dogs or prize-fighters or sailors or adventurers-at-large, have all of them approximately the same instincts and the same careers. They rise to eminence by battle, hold the eminence for a while by the same methods, and eventually go down under the rush of stronger enemies. London, with the strength of the strong, exulted in the struggle for survival. He saw human history in terms of the evolutionary dogma, which to him seemed a glorious, continuous epic of which his stories were episodes. He set them in localities where the struggle could be most obvious: in the wilds of Alaska, on remote Pacific Islands, on ships at sea out of hearing of the police, in industrial communities during strikes, in the underworlds of various cities, on the routes of vagabondage. As he had a boy's glee in conflict, so he had a boy's insensibility to physical suffering. *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) represents at its fullest his appetite for cold ferocity in its record of the words and deeds of a Nietzschean, Herculean, Satanic ship captain whose incredible strength terminates credibly in sudden paralysis and impotence. *The Game* (1905) shouts the lust of the flesh as expressed in pugilism. *Before Adam* (1906) goes apparently still further afield in a quest for the primitive and moves among the half arboreal ancestors of the race. *White Fang* (1905) reverses *The Call of the Wild* and brings a wolf among dogs.

The Call of the Wild, summary as well as summit of London's achievement, is the story of a dog stolen from civilization to draw a sledge in Alaska, eventually to escape from human control and go back to the wild as leader of a pack of wolves. As in most animal tales the narrative is sentimentalized. Buck has a psychology which he derives too obviously from his human creator; learns the law of the brute wilderness too quickly and too consciously; dreams too definitely of the savage progenitors from whom he inherits, by way of atavism, his ability to contend with a new world. The pathetic fallacy, however, has behind it a reality in London's own experience which lends power to the drama of Buck's restoration to the primitive. In something of this fashion the young tramp had learned the hard rules of the road; in something of this fashion the gold-seeker had mastered the difficulties of the Klondike face to face with a pitiless nature which made no allowance for his handicaps and which apparently desired the destruction of the men who had ventured into the wilderness. Out of his experience he had built up a doctrine concerning the essential life of mankind, and out of his doctrine he had shaped this characteristic tale. But the doctrine is not excessively in evidence, and the experience contributes both an accurate lore and an authentic passion. The narrative is as spare as an expedition over the Chilkoot Pass; it is swift and strong, packed with excitement and peril. Moreover, it has what almost none of Jack London's "red blood" rivals had, and what he later deprived himself of by his haste and casualness: a fine sensitiveness to landscape and environment, a robust, moving, genuine

current of poetry which warms his style and heightens the effect while enriching it. The subsequent loss or surrender of such qualities cost London the higher place to which his genius entitled him but from which the defects of his artistic conscience and his excess of popularity held him down.

American naturalism has never produced a school or announced a program. Instead, beginning primarily as a disposition to dissent from the milder insipidities of average novels at the end of the last century, it has continued in that disposition ever since. Theodore Dreiser has successively set up massive pyramids of fiction built out of materials ordinarily rejected by genteel American builders as sordid or improper or dull. Though his hand is heavy and his mind not quite made up concerning his materials, his documentation of the age cannot be overlooked. Neither can that of Upton Sinclair, whose radical opinions have cost him heavily with ordinary publishers and public, but whose earnestness and skill in controversy deserve the high praise that they recall Thomas Paine. The past half-dozen years in seeing the energies of Edith Wharton devoted to the service of France have seen the cause of the novel temporarily deprived of an indubitable genius whose work has sophistication, satire, acuteness, verisimilitude, and grace to a degree unmatched among those of her contemporaries whose qualities may be thought of as already proved. At the other extreme from the fashionable New York which she ordinarily portrays is the East Side of Abraham Cahan, a novelist who has written few books in English but who in knowledge

and vividness surpasses all who have dealt with the proletarian immigrant in American cities.

The term naturalism by no means fits James Branch Cabell, who has laid the scene of much of his invention in medieval Europe and who at many points seems incorrigibly romantic; and yet a temper so ironical and so unconventional sets him widely apart from the rococo romancers of the years during which he commenced to write. He belongs rather with those brilliant newer writers, like Sherwood Anderson, Dorothy Canfield, Willa Cather, Floyd Dell, Zona Gale, Joseph Hergesheimer, Sinclair Lewis, and Ernest Poole, who seem to forecast a new generation of novelists who will not be content to strike some interesting note and then to keep on striking and exploiting it till the end of their careers, but who instead will dare to experiment and may thus succeed in growing. Hope springs, and help may come, from the example of the poets — of Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost and Edgar Lee Masters — who have recently been showing how much of drama can be distilled into a little verse. They have already been important influences upon the more scrupulous and reflective novelists, and a continuation of their influence is perhaps an element as much to be desired as any in the coming generation of American fiction.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Full bibliographies for all of the major novelists and most of the minor figures discussed in this volume may be found in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Putnam: 1917–21: 4 vols.) edited by William Peterfield Trent, John Erskine, Stuart P. Sherman, and Carl Van Doren. See especially the bibliographies to Chapters VI and VII in Book II and Chapter XI in Book III — all three of them dealing particularly with prose fiction. In *A Manual of American Literature* (Putnam: 1909) edited by Theodore Stanton there is a useful chapter on *The Novelists* by Clark Sutherland Northup. Other important general accounts are: *Leading American Novelists* (Holt: 1910) by John Erskine; *Southern Fiction Prior to 1860: An Attempt at a First-Hand Bibliography* (University of Virginia: 1909) by J. G. Johnson; *History of Southern Fiction* by Edwin Mims in *The South in the Building of the Nation* (Richmond: 1909–13: 13 vols.); *A History of American Literature Since 1870* (Century: 1915) by F. L. Pattee.

CHAPTER I

The period to 1830 is covered in *The Early American Novel* (Columbia University: 1907) by Lillie Deming Loshe and in *Early American Fiction, 1774–1830* (Privately printed, Stamford, Conn.: 1902; revised edition, New York: 1913), a bibliography by Oscar Wegelin. For Brackenridge see *A Bibliography of H. H. Brackenridge* (Heartman, New

York: 1917) by Charles F. Heartman. *Modern Chivalry* has long been out of print, as have *A Pretty Story, The Foresters, The Coquette, The Algerine Captive, Female Quixotism, The Asylum,* etc. An edition of *Charlotte Temple* (Funk and Wagnalls: 1905) contains an introduction and a bibliography by F. W. Halsey. Charles Brockden Brown's novels were issued in six volumes by Mackay (Philadelphia) in 1887. *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown* (Philadelphia: 1815: 2 vols.) by William Dunlap and *Memoirs of Charles Brockden Brown, the American Novelist* (London: 1822), a shorter biography by the same hand, are the sources of most information regarding Brown. Further titles may be found listed in the *Cambridge History,* Vol. I, pp. 527–29.

CHAPTER II

The most desirable edition of Cooper it that with introductions by his daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper now published by Houghton Mifflin in 32 vols. *James Fenimore Cooper* (Houghton Mifflin: 1883) by Thomas R. Lounsbury and *James Fenimore Cooper* (Lane: 1913) by Mary E. Phillips are both important, the former for critical analysis, the latter for anecdotal information. See also the *Cambridge History,* Vol. I, pp. 530–34, for a more extended bibliography.

CHAPTER III

For Neal see his *Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life* (Boston: 1869). For Judd see *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd* (Boston: 1857) by Arethusa Hall. For Paulding see *Literary Life of James K. Paulding* (New York: 1867) by William I. Paulding. For Kennedy see

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CHAPTER IV

The best editions of Hawthorne are those published by Houghton Mifflin, particularly the Riverside and Wayside editions in 13 volumes with notes by G. P. Lathrop. There are numerous useful biographical and critical studies: *A Bibliography of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Houghton Mifflin: 1905) by Nina E. Browne; *Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Walter Scott: 1890) by Moncure D. Conway; *N. Hawthorne: Sa Vie et son Oeuvre* (Paris: Hachette: 1905) by L. Dhaleine; *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife* (Houghton Mifflin: 1885: 2 vols.) and *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Circle* (Harper:

1903) both by Julian Hawthorne; *Hawthorne* (Macmillan: 1879) by Henry James; *Memories of Hawthorne* (Houghton Mifflin: 1897) by Rose Hawthorne Lathrop; *Hawthorne and his Publisher* (Houghton Mifflin: 1913) by Caroline Ticknor; *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Houghton Mifflin: 1902) by George E. Woodberry. See also the *Cambridge History,* Vol. II, pp. 415–24, for a larger bibliography.

CHAPTER V

For the dime novel see *The Dime Novel in American Life* (*Atlantic Monthly:* July, 1907) by Charles M. Harvey. For Cooke see the forthcoming *Life of John Esten Cooke* (Columbia University) by John Beaty. For Winthrop see *The Life and Poems of Theodore Winthrop* (New York: 1884) edited by Laura Winthrop Johnson. For Curtis see *George William Curtis* (Houghton Mifflin: 1894) by Edward Cary. *Prue and I, Reveries of a Bachelor, Dream Life, The Wide Wide World,* most of the minor sentimental novels of the period covered in this chapter, and the works of Holland (Scribner), Roe (Dodd, Mead), and Wallace (Harper) remain regularly in print and are apparently still read, though by a diminishing audience. For Roe see *E. P. Roe: Reminiscences of his Life* (New York: 1899) by Mary A. Roe. For Wallace see *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography* (Harper: 1906). Mrs. Stowe's works are published in 15 volumes by Houghton Mifflin. See *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Houghton Mifflin: 1897) by Annie Fields; *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Houghton Mifflin: 1889) by C. E. Stowe; *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Houghton Mifflin: 1911) by C. E. and L. B. Stowe. The material dealt with in this chapter receives a somewhat similar treatment in Volume III of

the *Cambridge History,* Chapter XI, the bibliography to which, Vol. IV, pp. 656–71, furnishes additional titles and critical guidance.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN W. DEFOREST in *The Nation* for January 9, 1868, and T. S. Perry in *The North American Review* for October 1872 interestingly discuss "The Great American Novel." For the local color writers see Chapter XI in Volume III of the *Cambridge History,* and also Chapter VI, *The Short Story,* in Volume II. For the period as a whole Pattee's *History of American Literature since 1870* is indispensable. DeForest's novels have not been reprinted. There are accounts of Edward Eggleston in George Cary Eggleston's *The First of the Hoosiers* (Philadelphia: 1903) and in Meredith Nicholson's *The Hoosiers* (Macmillan: 1900). The writings of William Dean Howells are published by various houses, chiefly Houghton Mifflin and Harper. The most extensive bibliography is that in the *Cambridge History,* Vol. IV, pp. 663–66. There is a critical study, *William Dean Howells* (Huebsch: 1917), by Alexander Harvey. No authentic biography of Howells has yet been published, but much information concerning him may be found in *Mark Twain's Letters* (Harper: 1917: 2 vols.) and in *The Letters of Henry James* (Scribner: 1920: 2 vols.), as well as in Howells's own autobiographical writings, particularly *Years of My Youth, My Literary Passions, Literary Friends and Acquaintance.*

CHAPTER VII

THE books of Mark Twain are published by Harper. Albert Bigelow Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography* (Harper:

1912: 3 vols.) is an essential source for information regarding not only Mark Twain but also the entire period, particularly the relations between Mark Twain and Howells. There is also *A Short Life of Mark Twain* (Harper: 1920) by Paine. Of critical studies the most important are Howells's *My Mark Twain* (Harper: 1910) and Van Wyck Brooks's *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (Dutton: 1920), the last a brilliant and illuminating piece of criticism. The *Cambridge History* brings the bibliography of Mark Twain to 1920, Vol. IV, pp. 635–39.

CHAPTER VIII

Henry James collected most of his novels and tales for the New York Edition (Scribner: 1907–09: 24 vols.; 2 more vols. added 1917), to which he contributed prefaces containing by far the most important commentary yet made upon his work. His *Letters* (Scribner: 1920: 2 vols.) are full of hints regarding his aims and methods. The *Cambridge History* brings the James bibliography down to 1920, Vol. IV, pp. 671–75. Of critical studies the following are notable: *The Method of Henry James* (Yale University Press: 1918) by Joseph Warren Beach; *Henry James* (Holt: 1916) by Rebecca West.

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Little Brown, Cable's *The Grandissimes* by Scribner, and Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* by Harper. Miss Woolson's novels were published by Harper, and some of them are still in print. Mrs. Deland's *John Ward, Preacher* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward* are both published by Houghton Mifflin. The novels and stories of Stockton were issued by Scribner in a collected edition of 23 volumes in 1899–1904. *The Captain's Toll-Gate* (1903) contains a biographical sketch and a bibliography by Mrs. Stockton. The works of Eugene Field are published in 12 volumes by Scribner, as was also Slason Thompson's *Eugene Field* (1905: 2 vols.). The novels of Marion Crawford are published in 32 vols. by Macmillan, but Crawford still lacks a biography.

CHAPTER X

For the rococo romancers see Paul Leicester Ford's essay *The American Historical Novel* (*Atlantic:* December, 1897), Pattee's *American Literature since 1870,* and the text and bibliography of Chapter xi in Vols. III and IV of the *Cambridge History.* Most of these novels are still in print. S. Weir Mitchell's *Hugh Wynne* is published by Century as are his other chief novels. His works were collected in 16 vols. (Century: 1910). Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* is published by Appleton in an edition which has a biographical preface by Ripley Hitchcock. Norris's works are published by Doubleday Page, who in 1914 issued a small pamphlet, *Frank Norris,* by Charles G. Norris. The novels of Jack London have recently been reissued in an edition of 21 volumes by Macmillan. No biography of either Norris or London has yet been published. For the living novelists a competent critical discussion is still lacking, though some material may be found in the following

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